BRITAIN'S BEST MILITARY HISTORY MAGAZINE

HISTORY of WAR

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VC Hero story
Reconquista clash
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"WE WILL NEVER SURRENDER!"

BRITAIN'S SECRET ARMY

From civilian saboteurs, to resistance networks, discover how the British prepared for Nazi invasion

NORWAY'S NELSON
Meet the daring admiral who ruled the Baltic seas

FUTURE
ISSUE 082

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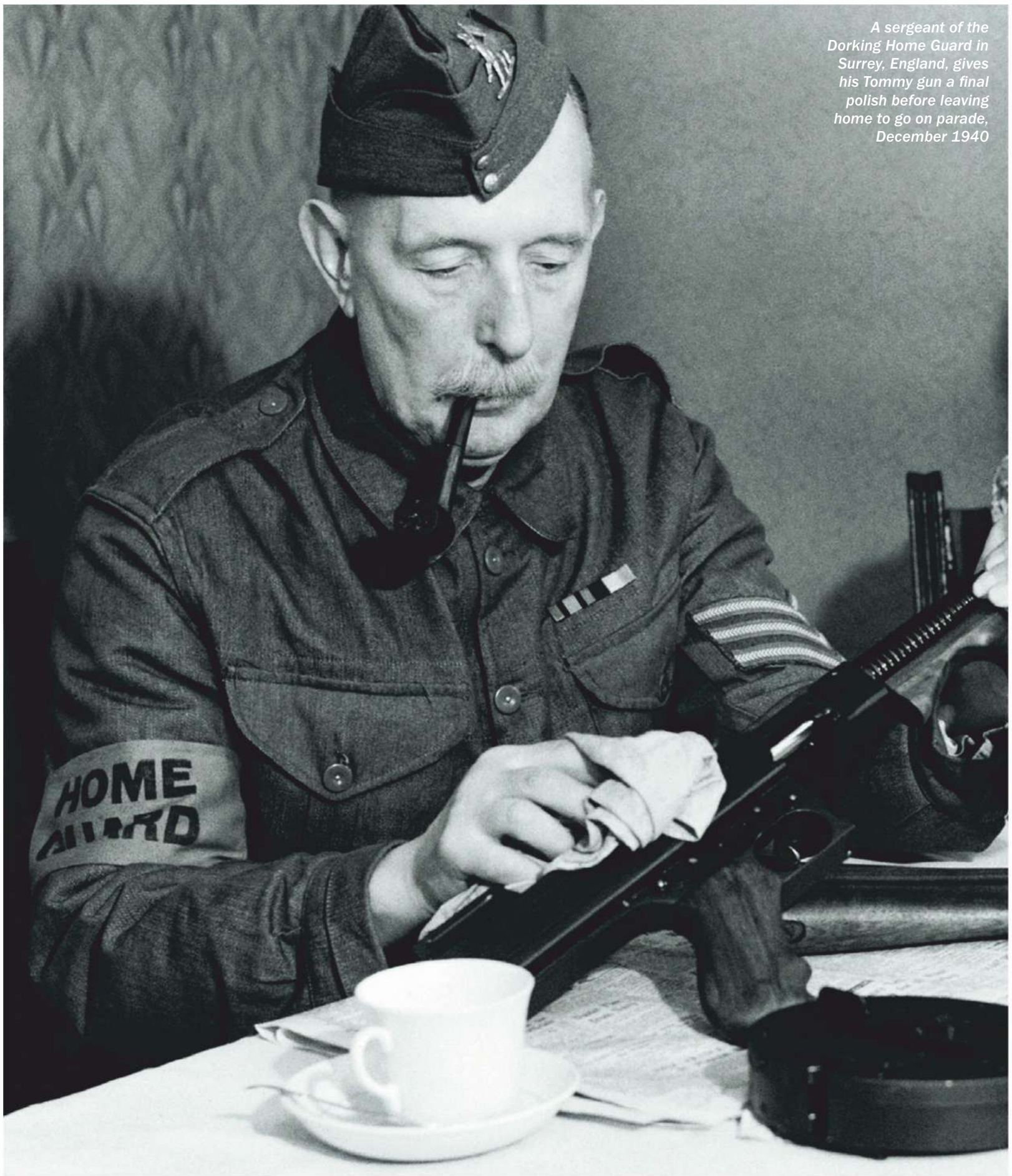
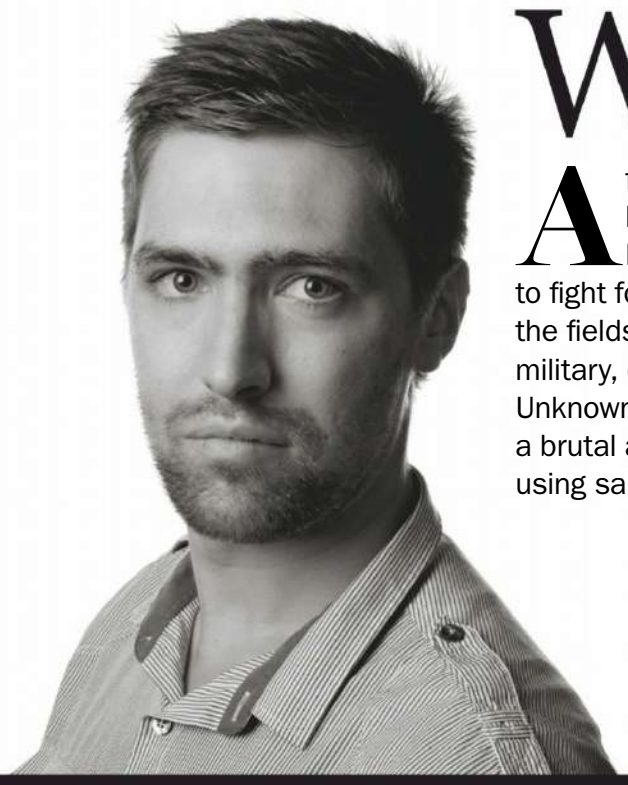


A sergeant of the Dorking Home Guard in Surrey, England, gives his Tommy gun a final polish before leaving home to go on parade, December 1940

© Getty



Welcome

After the fall of France, and the evacuation of Allied forces from Norway and Dunkirk, Nazi Germany was master of western Europe. After the rapid collapse of its ally, Britain was preparing to fight for its very survival. As Churchill put it on 4 June, "We shall fight in the fields and in the streets." At the most secretive level of the British military, over 3,000 civilian soldiers were preparing for just such a fight. Unknown to even their family and friends, these men were ready to wage a brutal and likely brief guerrilla campaign against the expected invasion, using sabotage and stealth as part of the British resistance.

Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS

TOM GARNER

This issue Tom spoke with Gulf War veteran and former Tornado navigator John Nichol. He discusses his new book on the iconic Lancaster bomber, its legacy and his personal bond with WWII veterans (p.42)

WILLIAM WELSH

For this month's Great Battles, William explores the critical Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), during Spain's Reconquista. Turn to page 34 to discover how Christian crusaders managed to strike a blow against the Almohad Caliphate.

DAVID SMITH

David takes a look at the formation, training and important role of the Local Defence Volunteers, disparagingly and affectionately dubbed 'Dad's Army', who in 1940 were in real preparation for German invasion (p. 28).

ACCESS THREE WWII E-BOOKS!

With issue 82, History of War readers can get three fantastic e-books – digital books you can read on your desktop, phone or tablet! This bundle includes: *Military Heroes Of The 20th Century*, *Battle Of The Atlantic* and *Book Of Dunkirk*.

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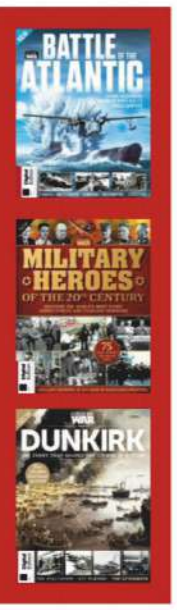

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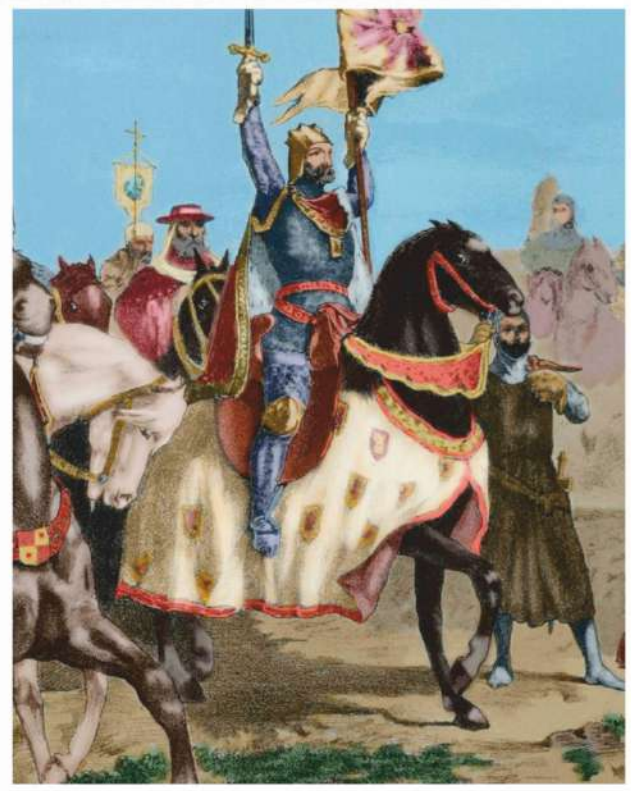

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This clash saw a turning point in the Reconquista

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An incredibly well preserved 'ishilunga' captured at the Battle of Ulundi in 1879

OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK

64 P-40 Warhawk
This aircraft served across nearly every theatre of WWII, across several air forces

© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

CAVALRY RECON

Taken: April 1917

Scouts of 9th Hodson's Horse (Bengal Lancers), British Indian Army, consult a map near Vraignes-en-Vermandois, during the Battle of Arras. Hodson's Horse was formed in 1857, during the Indian Rebellion, and after Independence the unit continued and today is part of the Indian Army Armoured Corps.

WAR in FOCUS

FLIGHT CLASS

Taken: c. 1940

Apprentices pay careful attention to a Royal Air Force officer as he explains flight procedure aboard a Vickers-Armstrong Wellington, or 'The Flying Classroom'. After the outbreak of the war, RAF apprenticeship courses were shortened, and intensified, in order to maximise the number of pilots and airman recruited into front line service.

© Getty

TIMELINE OF THE...

CRIMEAN WAR

The mid-19th century conflict is surprisingly widespread with battles taking place around the fringes of the Black Sea, Finland and even the Pacific Ocean – primarily between Russia and the Ottoman Empire

BATTLE OF SINOP 02

The Russian Navy wins a decisive victory against the Ottomans on the northern Turkish Black Sea coast. A technological game-changer in naval warfare, Sinop is notable for its extensive use of explosive shells. The Russian victory also brings Britain and France into the war.

30 November 1853

4 November 1853

February-May 1854

March-June 1854

BATTLE OF OLTENITA 01

The first battle of the Crimean War actually takes place in Romania between Russian and Ottoman forces in the region of the River Danube. The Ottomans win a tactical victory but are unable to advance on Bucharest and drive the invading Russians out of their territories.

Ottoman horsemen charge at the Russian infantry at Oltenita

SIEGE OF CALAFAT 03

The Ottomans defend Calafat in southern Romania against the Russians. During a four-month siege, the Russians suffer heavy losses from disease and attacks from the Ottoman fortified positions before they eventually withdraw.

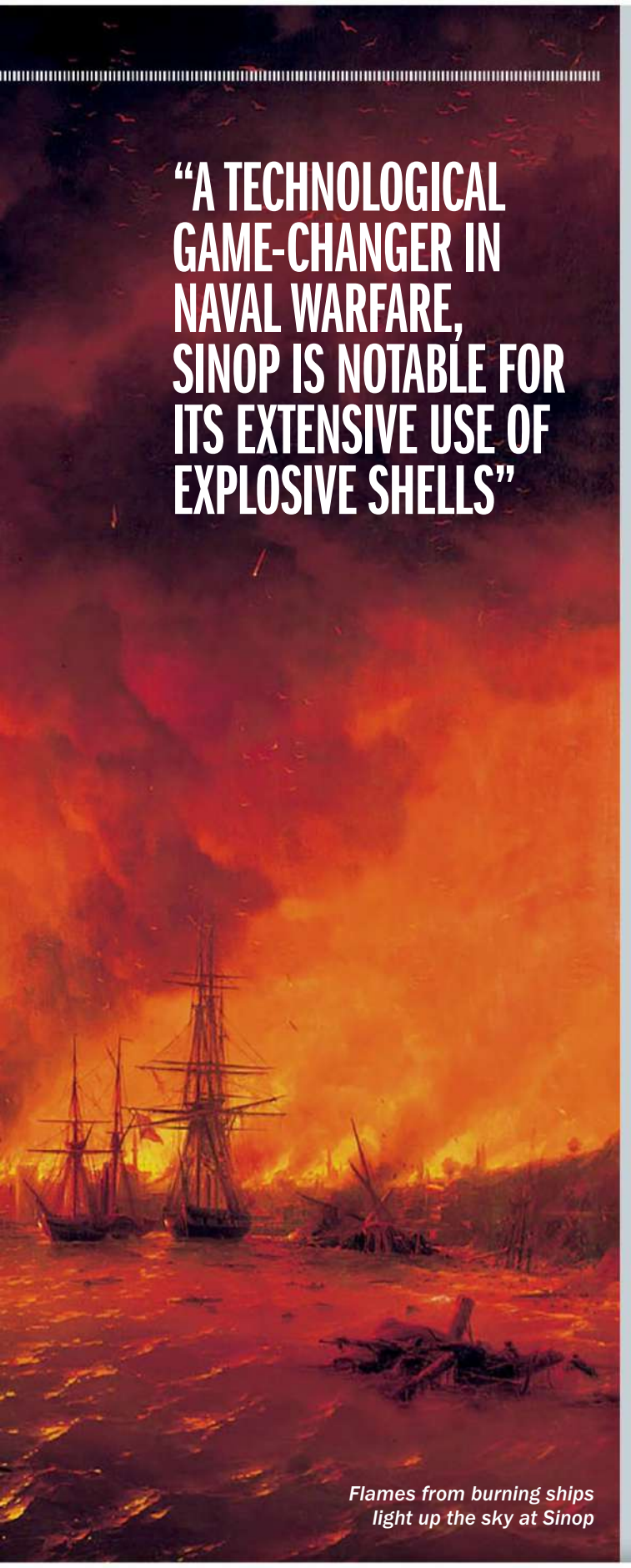
A French cartoon mocks Russian attempts to take Calafat

SIEGE OF SILISTRA 04

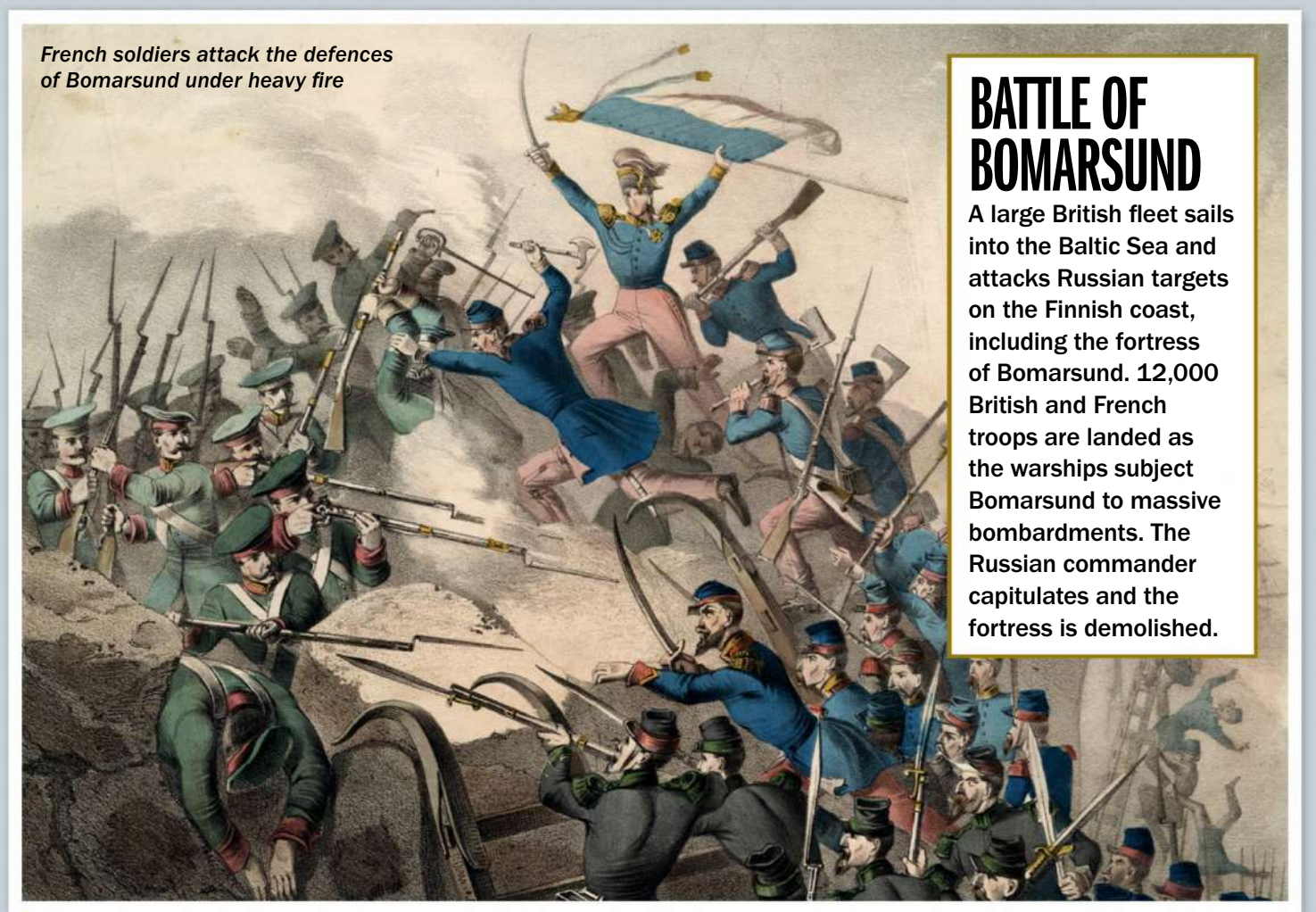
Like at Calafat, the Ottomans defend another town against the Russians – this time in Bulgaria. Silistra is well fortified with an inner citadel and ten outer forts. Some Russian assaults are successful but the Ottomans are able to stay supplied until the besiegers return to positions north of the Danube.

The victorious Ottoman garrison sallies out of Silistra

"A TECHNOLOGICAL GAME-CHANGER IN NAVAL WARFARE, SINOP IS NOTABLE FOR ITS EXTENSIVE USE OF EXPLOSIVE SHELLS"



Flames from burning ships light up the sky at Sinop



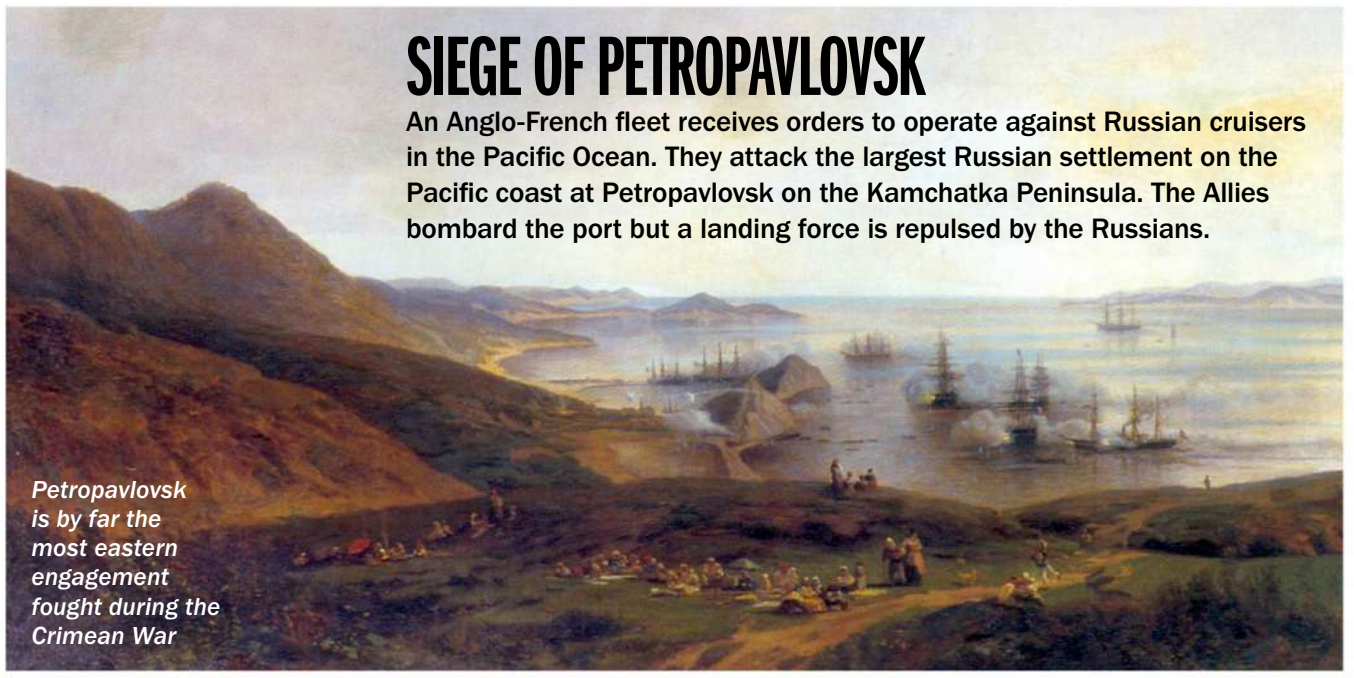
French soldiers attack the defences of Bomarsund under heavy fire

BATTLE OF BOMARSUND

A large British fleet sails into the Baltic Sea and attacks Russian targets on the Finnish coast, including the fortress of Bomarsund. 12,000 British and French troops are landed as the warships subject Bomarsund to massive bombardments. The Russian commander capitulates and the fortress is demolished.

SIEGE OF PETROPAVLOVSK

An Anglo-French fleet receives orders to operate against Russian cruisers in the Pacific Ocean. They attack the largest Russian settlement on the Pacific coast at Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Allies bombard the port but a landing force is repulsed by the Russians.



Petropavlovsk is by far the most eastern engagement fought during the Crimean War

6 August 1854 — **13-16 August 1854** — **1-4 September 1854** — **20 September 1854**

BATTLE OF KUREKDERE 05

Kurekdere is the only battle of the Crimean War to be fought on Armenian soil

An Ottoman army of 40,000 marches towards the city of Alexandropol (Gyumri) in Armenia and fight an outnumbered Russian force of approximately 20,000 men. The Ottomans make a series of strategic blunders, which enables the Russians to win one of their few land victories of the war.

BATTLE OF THE ALMA 06

The British and French (with Ottoman support) fight their first land battle after landing on the Crimean Peninsula. The Allies march towards the strategically important port of Sevastopol but the Russians make a stand on heights south of the River Alma. Although they incur heavy casualties while attacking the Russians uphill, the Allies win the battle.

The 2nd Rifle Brigade leads the British Light Division across the Alma

All images: Wiki / PD-Art

17 October 1854-9 September 1855

SIEGE OF SEVASTOPOL 07

Allied efforts in the Crimea concentrate on besieging Sevastopol (the home of the Russian Black Sea Fleet) with hundreds of thousands of men. All battles on the peninsula are fought with the ultimate aim of taking the port, which itself is subjected to many bombardments and assaults. Its eventual fall marks the Russians' defeat in the war.

The decisive French victory at the Battle of Malakoff during the siege leads to the fall of Sevastopol

25 October 1854

BATTLE OF BALACLAVA 08

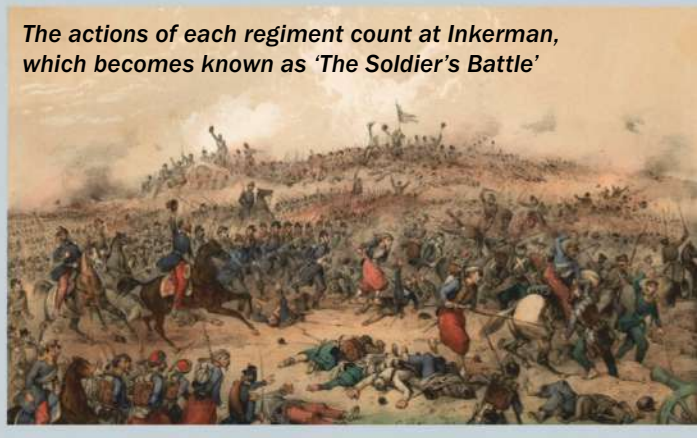
25,000 Russians attempt to distract the Allies by attacking in the direction of the British supply port of Balaclava. Although the actual battle is indecisive, Balaclava becomes legendary in British military history for the 'Thin Red Line' action of the 93rd Highland Regiment and the infamous 'Charge of the Light Brigade'.

'The Thin Red Line' becomes a figure of speech for any thinly spread military unit that holds firm against attack

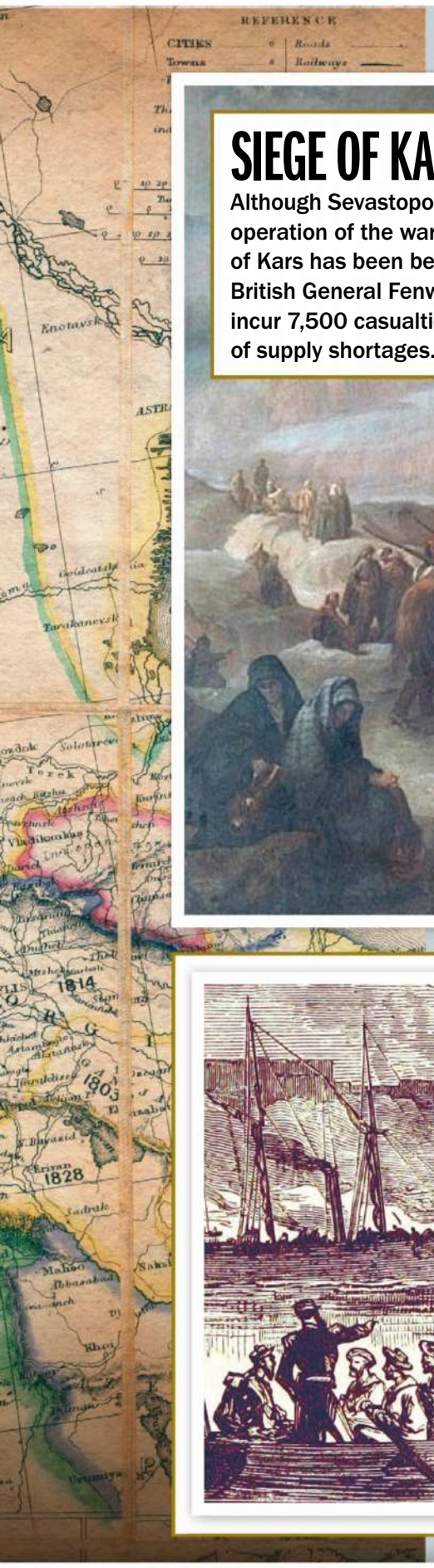
5 November 1854

BATTLE OF INKERMAN 09

42,000 Russians launch a surprise dawn attack against outnumbered British positions at Inkerman. Confused, often cut off fighting occurs in thick fog although the British prevail after doggedly determined combat and the arrival of French reinforcements.

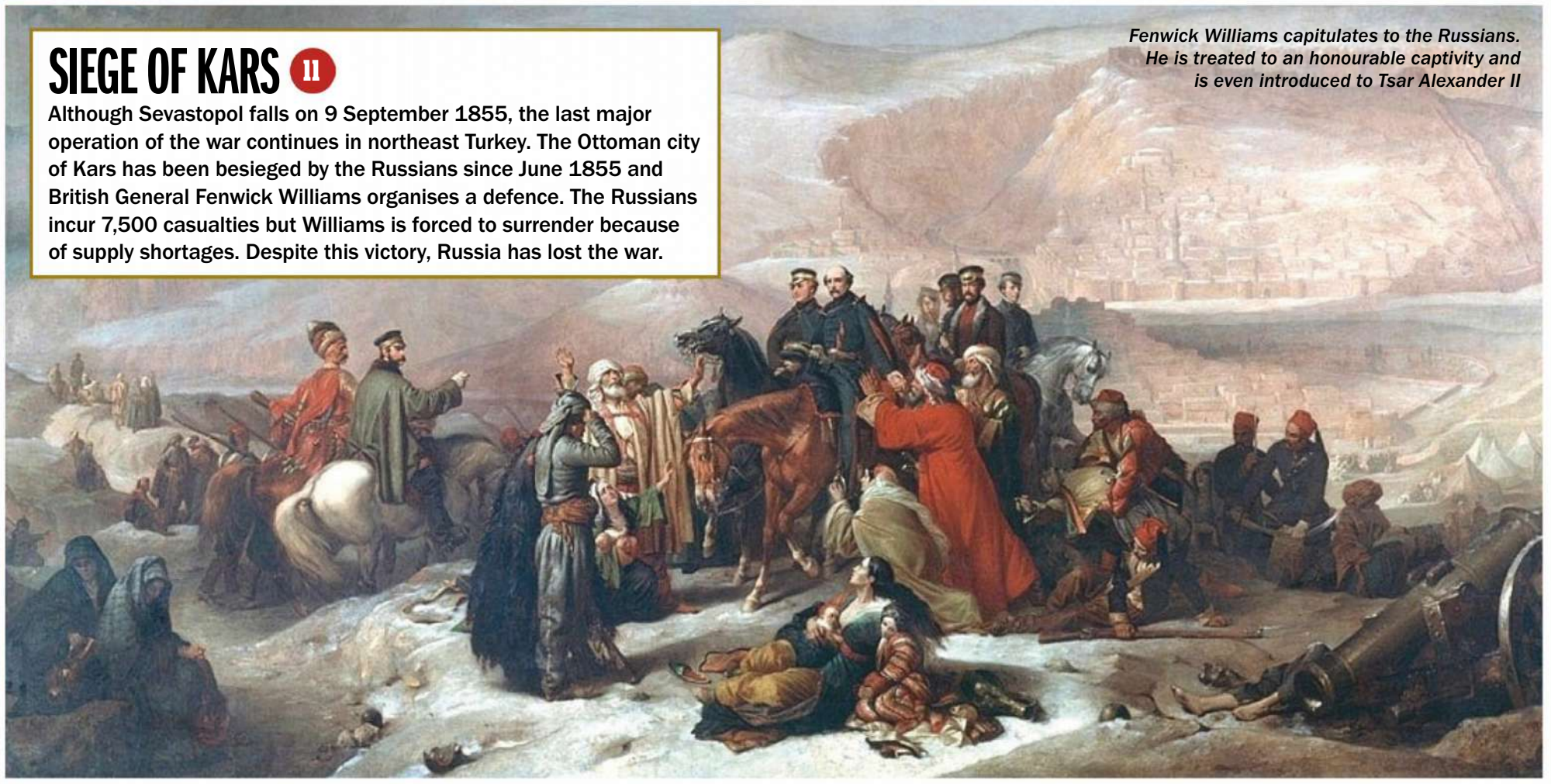


The actions of each regiment count at Inkerman, which becomes known as 'The Soldier's Battle'



SIEGE OF KARS 11

Although Sevastopol falls on 9 September 1855, the last major operation of the war continues in northeast Turkey. The Ottoman city of Kars has been besieged by the Russians since June 1855 and British General Fenwick Williams organises a defence. The Russians incur 7,500 casualties but Williams is forced to surrender because of supply shortages. Despite this victory, Russia has lost the war.



Fenwick Williams capitulates to the Russians. He is treated to an honourable captivity and is even introduced to Tsar Alexander II

BATTLE OF SUOMENLINNA

The Russian island fortress of Suomenlinna outside Helsinki is attacked by an Anglo-French fleet of 77 ships. An extensive bombardment ensues, which ignites several of the fortress's gunpowder magazines. However, most of the defences remain intact. The Allied fleet withdraws after failing to land troops at Helsinki.

British sailors participate in the attack on Suomenlinna

7-9 August 1855

June-29 November 1855

17 February 1855

BATTLE OF EUPATORIA 10

The Ottomans transfer soldiers from the Balkans to the western Crimean port of Eupatoria. The Russians attempt to make a surprise attack on Eupatoria's garrison but heavy Allied ground and naval support force them to retreat. The Ottoman-led victory ensures total command of the Black Sea and the continuation of the Siege of Sevastopol. Eupatoria is therefore the most important engagement on the peninsula beyond Sevastopol.

Egyptian troops in the Ottoman army charge the Russians at Eupatoria

All images: Wiki / PD-Art

SINOP 1853

Russia won a decisive maritime victory against the Ottoman Empire that also changed the course of naval warfare and ended the 'Age of Sail'

The Crimean War was a revolutionary conflict in terms of the evolution of military technology. Although it has since been characterised as taking place exclusively on the Crimean Peninsula, the war was geographically widespread with a significant naval component. Nowhere was this more emphasised than at the Battle of Sinop, which was fought off the northern coast of Turkey.

During the initial stages of the war, Russia initially fought the Ottoman Empire by crossing the River Danube and invading its Balkan territories. The Ottomans declared war on 4 October 1853 while British and French fleets moved up to Constantinople (Istanbul) to guard against any Russian naval attack from Sevastopol. Both countries were not officially at war with Russia at this point but fighting broke out in the Black Sea between Ottoman and Russian ships.

Ottoman convoys were established to provide a supply corridor to its army in Georgia. One of these was commanded by Patrona (Vice Admiral) Osman Pasha but his ships were prevented from sailing by stormy weather. Osman decided to winter at the port of Sinop where his convoy was joined by frigates. The addition of the frigates was important because although the Ottomans wanted to send ships of the line, they had been dissuaded to do so by the British ambassador in Constantinople.

Meanwhile, the Russian Admiral Pavel Nakhimov decided to attack Sinop before the Ottomans could be reinforced with more ships. Osman was aware of the Russian naval presence in the area but Sinop's harbour had very substantial defences. Nakhimov assembled over 700 cannons in six ships of the line, two frigates and three armed steamers. This force outnumbered the Ottomans' seven frigates, three corvettes, two steamers and no ships of the line.

The presence of steam ships in both fleets was an important sign of how naval technology had developed during the 19th century. Sailing battleships had ruled the seas for hundreds of years but their end as front line vessels was quickly approaching. Steam-powered warships had already appeared during the Greek War of Independence (1821-29) and had also been used in naval operations on the Syrian coast and in the Adriatic Sea. Wooden sailing ships were the predominant vessels at Sinop, however, there were other signs of industrial progress being made as well.

The Russians were equipped with Paixhans guns – the first naval cannons that could fire explosive shells. Before Sinop, the standard maritime armament was smooth-bored cannons that fired solid cannonballs, shot or shrapnel. Explosive shells already existed on land for howitzers and mortars but the high-powered Paixhans used a delaying mechanism to allow shells to be fired safely in a flat trajectory. This would have a decisive effect on the outcome of the coming battle.

"BRITAIN AND FRANCE REGARDED THE ATTACK AT SINOP AS UNJUSTIFIED, WHICH INCREASED ANTI-RUSSIAN SENTIMENT IN WESTERN EUROPE"

A depiction of the battle painted by Alexey Bogolyubov (1824-96) who served in the Russian Navy before becoming an artist

An explosive ambush

With their numerical superiority in ships and guns, the Russians entered Sinop's harbour on 30 November 1853 from the northwest in a triangular formation. This trapped the Ottoman convoy between the Russian ships and Sinop's harbour defences, the latter of which exposed Osman to potential friendly fire. Nakhimov manoeuvred to cover the harbour in interlocking fields of fire by spacing his ships evenly in two lines. The Ottoman ships effectively became sitting targets when the Russians began firing shells.

Fires immediately broke out among the Ottoman vessels, which its panicked sailors found difficult to extinguish. In less than one hour, the Russians comprehensively defeated Osman's ships, with the majority of them being purposely grounded. In addition, an Ottoman frigate and steamer were sunk and two shore batteries destroyed. Only the 12-gun steamer frigate 'Taif' managed to escape the battle while the Russians received repairable damage to just three ships. Almost 3,000 Ottoman sailors were killed and 150 taken prisoner, including Osman. By contrast, just 37 Russians were killed and 229 wounded.

The Russians now had operational control of the Black Sea. Britain and France regarded the attack at Sinop as unjustified, which increased anti-Russian sentiment in Western Europe. The battle was eventually used as the Anglo-French justification for declaring war on Russia although the real reason was to curb perceived Russian expansionism.

DAYS OF MILITARY HONOUR

THE BATTLE OF SINOP IS ANNUALLY COMMEMORATED IN RUSSIA ALONG WITH OTHER OFFICIAL DAYS TO COMMEMORATE FAMOUS RUSSIAN VICTORIES

Russia commemorates 17 days every year that each represent an outstanding military victory won during the country's history. Some of the days are state holidays but the majority are celebrated purely by the armed forces.

The earliest 'Day of Military Honour' by year is 1242, which commemorates Alexander Nevsky's victories against the Teutonic Livonian Order at the Battle on the Ice on 18 April. The other Medieval day is for the Battle of Kulikovo, which was fought against the Mongols on 21 September 1380. Sinop forms one of only two days from the 19th century, with the other being the far more famous Battle of Borodino against Napoleon on 8 September 1812.

The most prominent days focus around Soviet victories during WWII. The Siege of Leningrad and the battles of Kursk, Moscow and Stalingrad are all prominently commemorated while the most important days are reserved for May and November. On 9 May a state holiday known as 'Victory Day' is held in recognition of the surrender of Nazi Germany in 1945. The 7 November marks the October Revolution Parade that took place during the Battle of Moscow. The only other state holiday apart from Victory Day is 'Defender of the Fatherland Day' on 23 February, which commemorates the founding of the Red Army in 1918 during the Russian Civil War.

Russian soldiers ceremonially march through Red Square in Moscow to commemorate the October Revolution Parade in 1941, 7 November 2018

Source: Wiki / Mos.ru

Source: Wiki / PD Art

CONFLICT PHOTOGRAPHY

Roger Fenton's photographs of field camps, men and officers are some of the history's earliest examples of wartime photojournalism

As well as the medical, technical and strategic innovations emerging on 19th century battlefields, a new art form was also changing the way war was depicted to the outside world. In previous centuries, battlefields were exclusively displayed in paintings, often dramatic and heroic in content, presenting a grand and mostly romanticised version of war. With the great advances of camera technology during the 1800s, there was a new opportunity to capture more realistic images of war. A law graduate with a love of art, Roger Fenton became attracted by the potential of photography, and took a camera with him on a trip to Russia in 1852, photographing bridges, architecture and landscapes. After the outbreak of the Crimean War, Fenton received a commission to document the war in photographs from printmaker Thomas Agnew & Sons. The result was one of the first extensive photographic records of war. Fenton spent four months in Crimea, capturing 360 images of the officers, men and landscapes of the conflict. Though not financially successful, the series of images provide an invaluable insight into the Crimean War.

Fenton produced several portraits of himself, dressed in the uniforms of various iconic units and line infantry, here playing the part of a French zouave soldier.

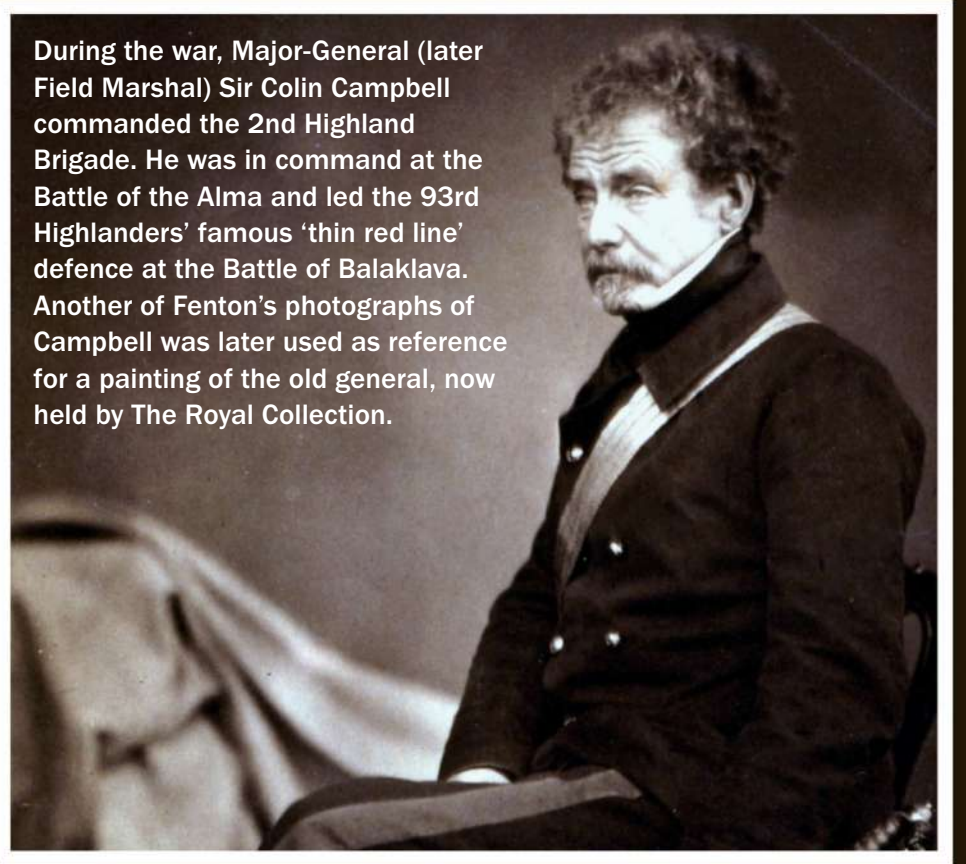
"FENTON SPENT FOUR MONTHS IN CRIMEA, CAPTURING 360 IMAGES OF THE OFFICERS, MEN AND LANDSCAPES OF THE CONFLICT"

Titled 'The Valley of the Shadow of Death', this depicts a cannon shot-strewn section of the road to Sevestopol. Perhaps one of the most iconic images from the war, there has long been debate over whether Fenton manipulated the scene, in particular the cannon balls, in order to provide a more dramatic effect. Nonetheless the photograph remains a powerful depiction of war's brutality, and for many is reminiscent of the fateful charge of the Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava.

Officers and men of General Pierre Bosquet's division sit with the painter Paul Alexandre Protais (seated left). Seated to the right is General Cissé, Bosquet's aide-de-camp, and stood to the left and centre are zouave infantrymen – their distinctive uniforms instantly recognisable.

Private soldiers and officers of the 3rd Regiment (known as The Buffs) piling arms in camp. One of the oldest regiments in the British army, The Buffs took part in the Siege of Sevastopol where they suffered greatly in the gruelling, attritional conditions of the trenches.

During his time on the front line, Fenton travelled with a portable dark room, converted from a commercial wagon, where he could process his photographs. Conditions in the field were less than ideal for the delicate methods required for developing photographs, and the heat especially proved difficult for storing the required chemicals. In total, Fenton brought five different cameras and 700 glass plates with him to the front. Pictured here with the cart is Fenton's assistant, Marcus Sparling.



During the war, Major-General (later Field Marshal) Sir Colin Campbell commanded the 2nd Highland Brigade. He was in command at the Battle of the Alma and led the 93rd Highlanders' famous 'thin red line' defence at the Battle of Balaklava. Another of Fenton's photographs of Campbell was later used as reference for a painting of the old general, now held by The Royal Collection.

As well as richly dressed officers, Fenton's photographs also show ordinary soldiers, workers and camp hands – here, a group of Croatian labourers.

Ottoman General Ismail Pacha, or György Kmety, posing with Turkish soldiers and a large pipe called a chibouk. Kmety was a Hungarian serving with the Ottoman army, where he went by the name Ismail Pacha.

All images: Wiki / PD / CC

WARTIME PIONEERS

Away from the fame of Florence Nightingale and the infamy of incompetent commanders, the Crimean War produced remarkable people involved in medicine, literature, journalism and cuisine

MARY SEACOLE

THE HEROIC BATTLEFIELD NURSE

1805-81 *JAMAICA*

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, to a Scottish soldier and a mixed-race proprietress of an officer's boarding house, Seacole (née Grant) had an obscure early life. It is known that she acquired nursing skills through her mother based on Creole medical traditions that largely involved herbal treatments. She married Lord Nelson's godson, Edwin Horatio Seacole, but was soon widowed. Seacole ran the family boarding house for several years while treating cases of cholera and yellow fever. After briefly serving as a nursing superintendent at Kingston's Up-Park Military Camp, Seacole sailed to England upon the outbreak of the Crimean War.

She attempted to join Florence Nightingale's first group of Crimean nurses but her application was declined. Determined to provide her services, Seacole sailed to the Crimea at her own expense and arrived at Balaclava in February 1855. After meeting her husband's kinsman Thomas Day, who was locally involved in shipping, the pair set up the 'Seacole and Day Hotel' between Balaclava harbour and the British military headquarters. The hotel housed a club for British officers and a hygienic canteen for troops. Day remained at Balaclava while Seacole managed the facilities.

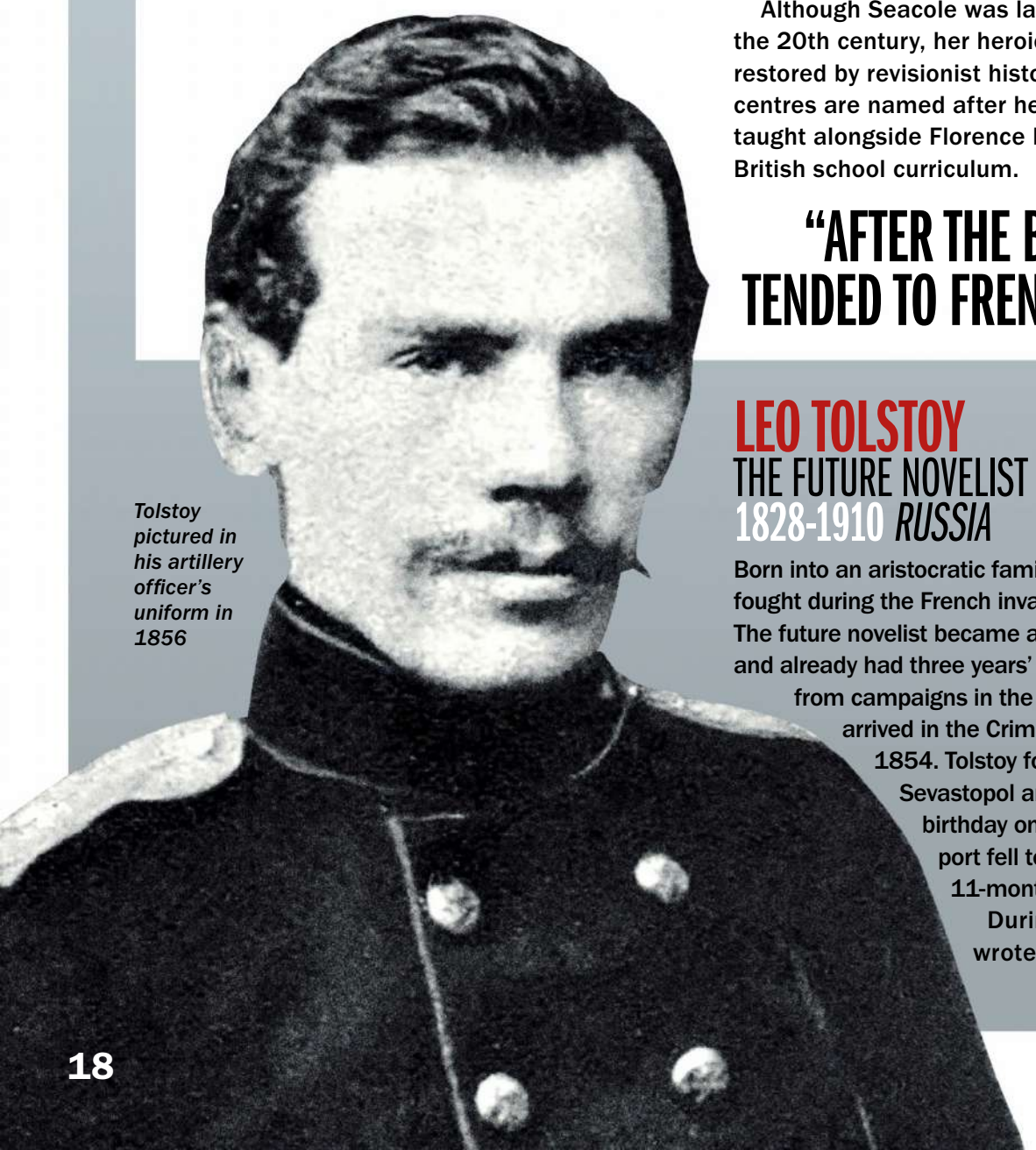
This independence allowed Seacole to carry out solo nursing missions on the battlefield. By June 1855 she was a familiar figure who rode forward with two mules carrying medicine, food and wine. Seacole provided comfort to the wounded and dying after assaults on Sevastopol and her care was not just administered to British soldiers. After the Battle of Chernaya in August 1855, she tended to French, Italian and even Russian casualties as well as providing lunch for nearby British regiments.

Much-loved by British soldiers who called her 'Mother Seacole', her exploits were publicised by journalist William Howard Russell and she became famous in Britain. Although the Crimea left her financially ruined, she wrote a bestselling autobiography and her service was eventually recognised by the 'Seacole Fund'. With patrons including the Prince of Wales, the fund allowed Seacole to live comfortably in London until her death.

Although Seacole was largely forgotten during the 20th century, her heroic reputation has been restored by revisionist histories. Many nursing centres are named after her and her story is taught alongside Florence Nightingale's in the British school curriculum.

Seacole was posthumously awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit in 1991 and she was voted as the greatest Black Briton in 2004

"AFTER THE BATTLE OF CHERNAYA IN AUGUST 1855, SHE TENDED TO FRENCH, ITALIAN AND EVEN RUSSIAN CASUALTIES"



Tolstoy pictured in his artillery officer's uniform in 1856

LEO TOLSTOY

THE FUTURE NOVELIST WHOSE WRITING WAS SHAPED BY THE SIEGE OF SEVASTOPOL

1828-1910 *RUSSIA*

Born into an aristocratic family, Tolstoy's father had fought during the French invasion of Russia in 1812. The future novelist became a junior artillery officer and already had three years' military experience from campaigns in the Caucasus before he arrived in the Crimea in the winter of 1854. Tolstoy fought at the Siege of Sevastopol and celebrated his 27th birthday on the same day that the port fell to the Allies after an 11-month bombardment.

During the siege, Tolstoy wrote realistic dispatches that were published in an influential St Petersburg journal. These were later collected into a book called *Sevastopol Sketches* and his graphic, unflinching accounts of siege warfare made him famous.

The Crimean War also deeply disillusioned Tolstoy and heavily informed his writing. He came to consider that battles were deliberate folly and that ordinary Russians did not deserve the treatment they received from their rulers. Common humanity replaced blind patriotism in his mind and these ideas borne of conflict found their most potent expression in his novel *War And Peace*.

ALEXIS SOYER
THE FRENCH CHEF WHO REVOLUTIONISED BATTLEFIELD CATERING
1810-58 *FRANCE*

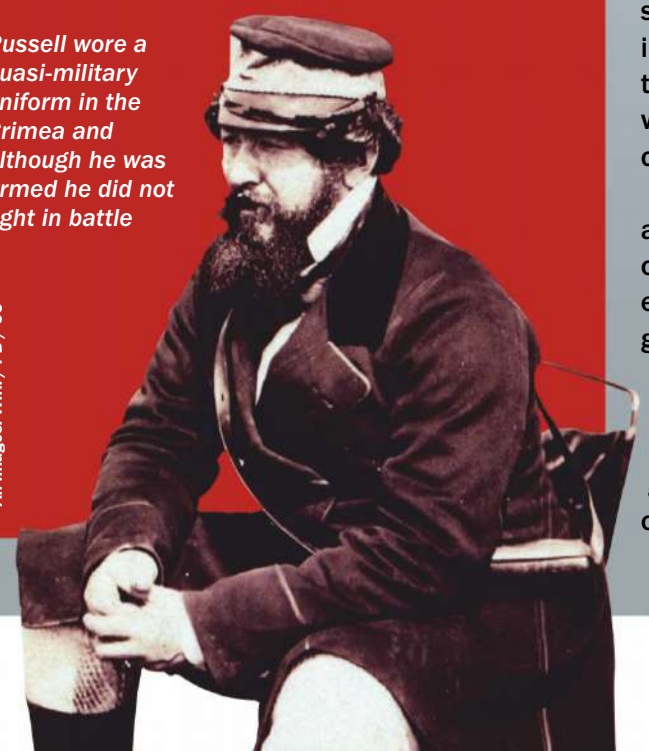
Born at Meaux-en-Brie, Soyer was a well-regarded chef in France before he moved to Britain in 1830. He cooked for Queen Victoria among others before he assisted in efforts to relieve the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s. Soyer set up relief kitchens in Ireland and published a book that gave proceeds to famine charities. During this time, he invented a portable, lightweight travelling stove that could be transported and used in remote locations like field hospitals. The success of the 'Magic Stove' became apparent in the Crimea. Soyer travelled there at his own expense to support cooking for the British Army. He worked with Florence Nightingale to revise the diet sheets for military hospitals and his stoves were installed in camp kitchens. They ensured that soldiers received an adequate meal and would not suffer from malnutrition or food poisoning. Adaptations of what became known as the 'Soyer Stove' remained in British military service until the Gulf War (1990-91). Soyer later wrote about his experiences in a book called *A Culinary Campaign*.

One Soyer Stove could cook food for 50 men either indoors or outdoors and worked in all weather conditions, including heavy rain

WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL
THE IRISH WAR CORRESPONDENT WHO EXPOSED THE BRUTAL REALITIES OF THE CONFLICT
1820-1907 *GREAT BRITAIN*

Russell was educated at Trinity College Dublin and began his journalistic career in London and Ireland. A reporter with *The Times*, he first reported on conflict during the First Schleswig War in Denmark in 1850 before making his name in the Crimea. Unwelcomed by the British high command, Russell befriended junior officers and lower ranks, and gained information by observing them. He championed the ordinary British soldier while sharply criticising senior officers, including Commander-in-Chief Lord Raglan.

His dramatic writing had a great impact on the British public and politicians and he coined the phrase "The Thin Red Line" from his paraphrased description of Highland troops at Balaclava. Russell exposed logistical and medical bungling, which encouraged Florence Nightingale to set out for the Crimea. At the same time, he also supported Mary Seacole's nursing efforts. His reports of the atrocious fighting conditions were the first time that the British public regularly read about the realities of warfare en masse. As such, Russell (who was later knighted) is regarded as one of the first modern war correspondents.



Russell wore a quasi-military uniform in the Crimea and although he was armed he did not fight in battle

All images: Wiki / PD / CC

FANNY DUBERLY
THE DIARIST WHO RECORDED A UNIQUE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE ON THE FRONT LINE
1829-1902 *GREAT BRITAIN*

Born in Wiltshire, England, Duberly (née Locke) married Lieutenant Henry Duberly in 1850 and accompanied him to the Crimea on the outbreak of war. Her husband was promoted to captain and acted as the paymaster for the 8th Royal Irish Hussars. Duberly ignored orders for wives to be excluded from the war zone and witnessed many battles, including the Charge of the Light Brigade and the Battle of Malakoff. She shared her husband's hut in the brigade lines, experienced winter privations and rode into Sevastopol soon after it fell.

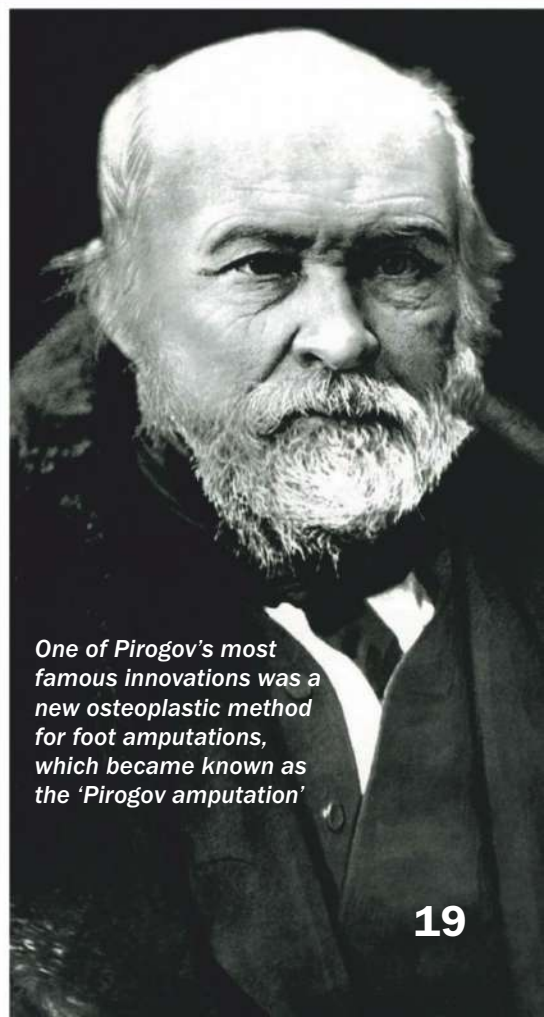
Duberly recorded all of these events in a daily diary that was notable for its detail and self-confidence, with an often blunt and sobering tone. Large extracts were sold in a bestselling book called *Journal Kept During The Russian War*. Its wilfulness and lack of heroic romanticism offended some readers, including Queen Victoria who refused to write a dedication. Duberly went on to accompany her husband to India where she wrote another book before they retired to Cheltenham in the 1880s.

Duberly photographed on horseback in the Crimea, 1855

NIKOLAY PIROGOV
THE INNOVATIVE SURGEON WHO ENDORSED ANAESTHETICS, PLASTER CASTS, NURSES AND THE TRIAGE SYSTEM
1810-81 *RUSSIA*

Pirogov was a Moscow surgeon who became a professor of military surgery. During the Caucasian War he studied the effects of firearms injuries and introduced disarticulation of joints and resection of bones to save limbs instead of having them amputated. He also followed work by French surgeon Louis-Joseph Seutin that introduced plaster casts to set broken bones.

During the Crimean War, Pirogov became the leading exponent of anaesthesia in Russia and used it at the Siege of Sevastopol. As head of the Russian Army medical services, he regarded war as a traumatic epidemic where successful treatment of mass casualties required good management as well as surgical skill. Pirogov supported the deployment of female nurses and surgical assistants who worked under shellfire and became known as the 'Sisters of Mercy'. He also introduced the triage system where casualties were classified into four groups depending on the degree of injuries. This was the first ever use of triage in the management of mass casualties.



One of Pirogov's most famous innovations was a new osteoplastic method for foot amputations, which became known as the 'Pirogov amputation'

AN UNHOLY PATH TO WAR

Squabbles in the Holy Lands, fear of Russian imperialism, and the dream of former Napoleonic glory. What were the complex causes of the conflict in Crimea?

Superficially, the causes of the Crimean War lay in the ongoing disagreements between the Orthodox, Armenian and Catholic churches over the holy places in Palestine. Its real roots, however, went deeper into the decline of the Ottoman Empire: the 'Sick Man of Europe', which imperialist Russia looked to exploit. This in turn alarmed Britain, which, during the Great Game, grew increasingly paranoid of Russian expansion and particularly the perceived threat to India. Meanwhile, France looked for ways of restoring itself to former Napoleonic glory in the wake of the 1848 revolution.

In late 1847 the Christian churches began to quarrel over the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Both the Orthodox and Armenians held keys to the main door, while the Catholics had to make do with access via a side entrance through an adjoining chapel. To make matters worse, a silver star with Latin inscriptions went missing, the Catholics suggesting it was taken by the Orthodox clergy and using the 'theft' to appeal to Paris for support.

Napoleon III took up the plight of the Catholic clergy in 1849, instructing his ambassador to Constantinople to demand the 'restoration' of Catholic rights in the Holy Places. He also demanded the right to 'repair' the main cupola of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (which would include the removal of the Orthodox Pantokrator from the dome) and the right to 'restore' the Tomb of the Virgin at Gethsemane. The Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem made the counter-demand of the right to repair the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, something Tsar Nicholas I of Russia supported. There was little agreement.

In truth, Napoleon III's interest in the plight of the Catholics in Palestine stemmed from the French Revolution of 1848. Becoming President of France in December that year and Emperor from December 1852, he aimed to restore the French glory of his famous uncle, Napoleon I. Following the defeat of France in 1815, the country had been constrained by the conservative autocracies that made up the Concert of Europe. Napoleon III believed backing the Catholics in Palestine would not only increase French influence in the region but also bring new diplomatic gains for France. He also hoped it would weaken the Concert.

Nicholas, who viewed himself as defender of the Greek Orthodox church, insisted the Porte, the Ottoman government, allow Russia to act as protector of the Holy Places and all Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire. When the Porte was not forthcoming, Russian forces invaded the Ottoman provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia in July 1853. The British responded by sending ships to Constantinople in September. Turkey then declared war on Russia in October, but the following month the Russians destroyed a Turkish fleet at the Battle of Sinope in the Black Sea. British and French warships next entered the Black Sea in January 1854 to offer protection to Turkish transports. Tensions continued to increase.

Following Napoleon III's rise to power, the British had expected war with France. Yet, in a twist of fate it became allied with its traditional adversary in the face of Russian imperialism. The fragile multi-national and multi-religious Ottoman Empire had for some time been in decline, raising the so-called 'Eastern Question', the diplomatic contest for control over former Ottoman territories. When there was internal upheaval in the Turkish domains the major European powers feared one or more of the others might seek to take advantage of the disarray and extend their influence. The question rose during the Greek Revolution of the 1820s and again in the build up to what became the Crimean War.

Russia had supported Austria in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, suppressing the revolution when the Austrian Empire appeared on the verge of collapse. In return, Russia expected support in its intrigues into Ottoman affairs. Such a situation was intolerable to Britain, who wished to protect its commercial and strategic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East and looked to maintain the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark to Russian expansion in Asia. Therefore, Britain, led by Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen, joined with France to oppose Russia, using the Battle of Sinope as their casus belli to go to war. When the Russians refused an ultimatum to withdraw from the Danubian Principalities both powers declared war in March 1854.

Napoleon III dreamed of restoring France to its former glory under his famous uncle, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte

Nicholas I saw himself as defender of the Orthodox Church and protector of Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire

Source: Wiki / PD Art

“BRITISH AND FRENCH WARSHIPS NEXT ENTERED THE BLACK SEA IN JANUARY 1854 TO OFFER PROTECTION TO TURKISH TRANSPORTS. TENSIONS CONTINUED TO INCREASE”

British Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen sought to maintain the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russian expansionism

The Battle of Sinope, a Turkish defeat which prompted London and Paris to despatch warships to the Black Sea

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BRITAIN'S SECRET ARMY

© Alamy

In the summer of 1940 invasion seemed inevitable with Britain on its knees. However, a highly secret guerrilla force was being created to confront any Nazi offensive

WORDS **ANDREW CHATTERTON**
COLESHILL AUXILIARY RESEARCH TEAM (CART)

© Getty

© staybehinds.com colour by RJM

Warsash/Hook Patrol Hampshire

A lapel badge is the only public recognition the Auxiliary Units received

1940 marked some of the darkest days in British history. By the height of the summer, most of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had been successfully evacuated from Dunkirk, but arrived back home without the majority of its equipment and weapons. Meanwhile, the German army stood just across the Channel, poised to invade. Although the general perception is that the country was on its knees, it was during these desperate days that a highly secret guerrilla force was instigated; one designed to 'stay behind' and cause as much chaos as possible, delaying any invading army.

Secret beginnings in Kent

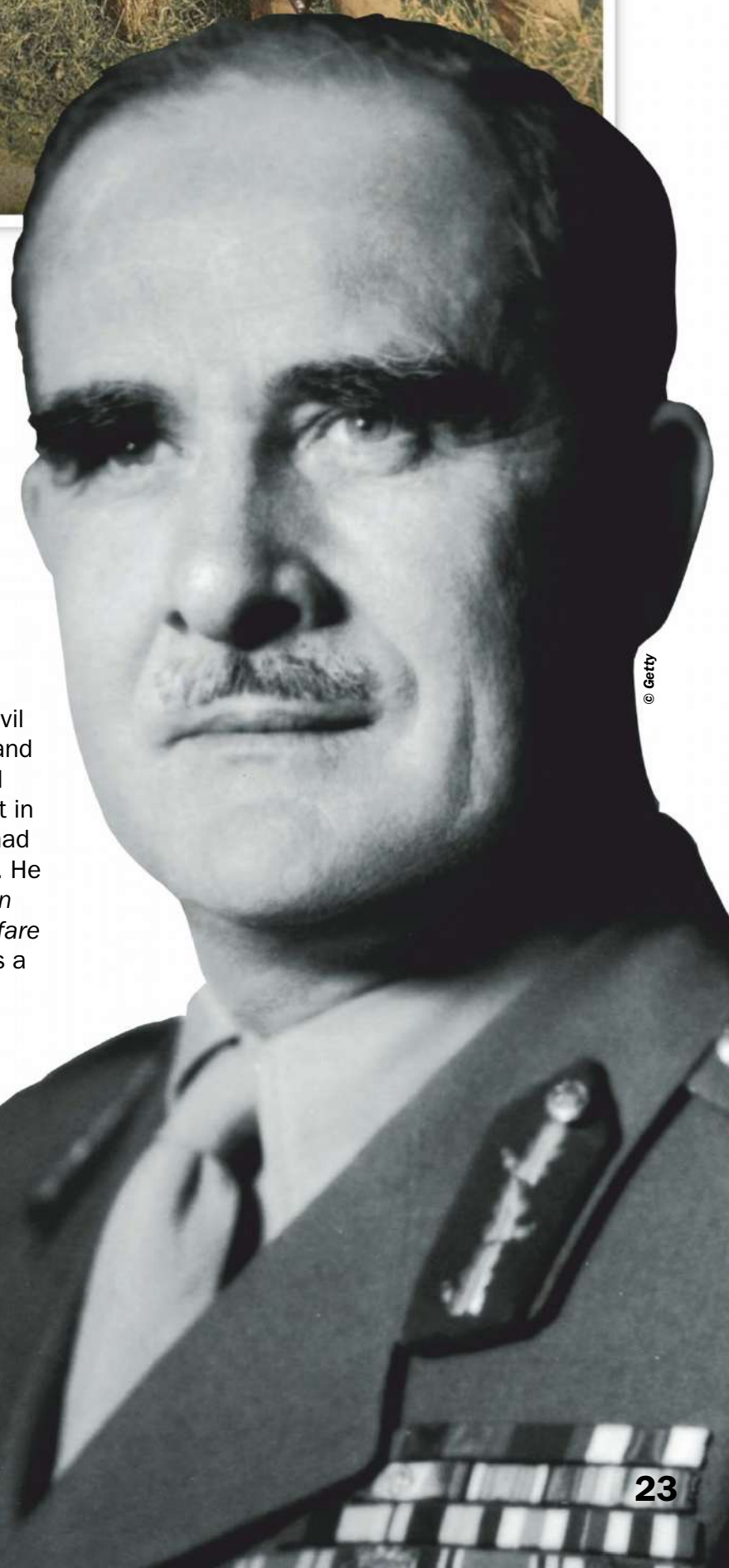
By June, Peter Fleming, the brother of Ian Fleming (the creator of James Bond), was busy organising a group of civilian volunteers in Kent, named the XII Corps Observation Unit. This became the prototype for the Auxiliary Units. Fleming was the perfect fit for organising such a force. A dashing former Guards officer, he was a pre-war explorer and had authored books on his travels in China and the jungles of Brazil. He worked for Military Intelligence (Research) and was immediately set the task of gathering local civilian volunteers and training them in explosives and sabotage.

Fleming had quickly identified and organised a number of men into effective outfits, ready to cause as much disruption to the invading German army as possible. He collected stores of equipment and explosives, built rudimentary underground dug-outs for the volunteers and had identified targets to be destroyed upon invasion. It became clear that these Patrols could make a real impact and the decision was made by Churchill to replicate Patrols in counties that had been identified as most vulnerable to invasion.

The Auxiliary Units grow

Another man, who like Fleming did not fit into the traditional mould of a British Army officer, was given the responsibility of extending these Patrols throughout the country. Colonel Colin Gubbins had served in France and Belgium as a gunner, during the First World War. After recovering from a war injury he was sent to Russia as part of the Allied intervention during the Russian Civil War in 1919. In the 1920s he fought in Ireland against the IRA, spent time in India, and led the Independent Companies that had fought in Norway in early 1940. All of this meant he had learnt the effectiveness of irregular warfare. He had also written three booklets: *The Partisan Leader's Handbook*, *The Art Of Guerrilla Warfare* and *How To Use High Explosives*, and so was a natural choice to lead such a force.

Time was of the essence, so Gubbins recruited like-minded officers through the 'old boys network'. Many of these men had also served with him in the Independent Companies in Norway. They were designated as Intelligent Officers (IOs) and sent across the



© Getty

Major-General Sir Colin Gubbins, Chief of the British Special Operations Executive, organising covert warfare during World War II. After the war he became director of Grays Carpets and Textiles Ltd

country to identify key areas and Patrol leaders, often from the ranks of the newly established Local Defence Volunteers (LDV).

In the short and only official history to be written about the Auxiliary Units, Major Nigel Oxenden said this of the recruiting process, "IOs automatically looked for game-keeper or poacher types of recruits, as being already trained in everything but explosives. If these men were also last war veterans, so much the better, they were probably steady, and well aware of their own limitations."

When a mysterious man came to the door of William Sage Ratford in the village of Bentley in Suffolk he was told that he was looking for "gamekeepers, poachers and burglars to form this group". Clearly, not your typical British Army recruitment.

The level of security surrounding the formation of the Auxiliary Units was huge. Dennis Blanchard in Bewholme, Yorkshire, remembers being asked by an officer whether he would be willing to "do a little job?". When Dennis asked for more details he was told he couldn't be told any more but it would involve "intensive training of a secret and dangerous nature". Another Auxiliary, Reginald Clutterham, was a farm worker in Ashill, Norfolk – shortly after joining the LDV, he was approached by a man and asked "… if I would like to do something more interesting than the Home Guard. Apparently, I had been observed for a month to see what sort of people I mixed with and what we talked about. If I wanted to join this special organisation I was told that I would have to sign the Official Secrets Act".

After these Patrol leaders were identified and recruited, it was up to them to form their own Patrol of trusted men and begin to organise themselves into an effective sabotage unit. Patrol leaders tended to recruit colleagues, friends and relatives, and even enemies, with some Patrols being made up of both gamekeepers and poachers. Each Patrol was made up of five to eight men who lived within close proximity to one another.

By September 1940, huge progress had been made. In a note to the Secretary of State for War on 25 September, Churchill said, "I have been following with much interest the growth and development of the new guerrilla formations … known as 'Auxiliary Units'. From what I hear these units are being organised with thoroughness and imagination, and should, in the event of invasion, prove a useful addition to the regular forces." Eventually more than 3,500 men were recruited the length of Britain, from the Outer Hebrides to the tip of Cornwall.

'Thuggery' – role of the Auxiliaries

It was Gubbins who first fully sketched out what role the Auxiliary Units (a deliberately nondescript name designed to throw the enemy off the scent) should play in the event of a German invasion.

When the Germans came, the Auxiliaries were to simply disappear, and because they had signed the Official Secrets Act, they could tell no-one, not even their closest family, where they were going or what they were up to. The significance of this should not be understated. These men would be leaving their families at an incredibly dangerous time. It was a huge sacrifice, but one it seems, that every Auxiliary was willing to make to help protect the country.

Their role was not to take on the invading army in a direct fight. Mostly operating at night, they were to destroy ammunition and fuel dumps, transport, aircraft, bridges, railways, anything that slowed down the

"THESE MEN WOULD BE LEAVING THEIR FAMILIES AT AN INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS TIME. IT WAS A HUGE SACRIFICE"

A Home Guardsman handles a Tommy gun during a training session at the War Office School in Surrey

© Getty

Sandford Levvy Patrol Somerset in OB

© staybehinds.com

A mock up of an Operational Base

Intact Operational Base in Devon

German advance and gave the regular army time to regroup and counter-attack.

Any direct contact with the enemy would be in the course of gaining entry to a target. Auxiliaries were trained in silent killing and other ways of dealing with sentries, utilising the Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife and other 'thuggery' methods including unarmed combat and targeting 'vulnerable' areas of the human body. Some Auxiliaries reported that they were told to dismember the bodies of enemy sentries to put the 'fear of God' into other enemy soldiers, a tactic used by guerrilla fighters throughout history.

Each Patrol was given enough rations to last approximately 11-14 days, after this they were expected to live off the land. Realistically the rations represented their likely life expectancy. This was very much considered a suicide mission and the members of each Patrol realised that. William Ratford said, "Perhaps we would have been heroes for a bit. But it would have been suicidal, I should think."

No Patrol member could be caught. If too badly injured during a raid, many Auxiliaries reported that they would expect to be killed by their fellow Patrol members, rather than fall into the enemy's hands and potentially give away the location of the Operational Base under torture.

Each Patrol also worked in complete isolation. In these early, crucial days of the Auxiliary Units, Patrols in the same county would have no idea of the location of the Operational Base of the neighbouring Patrol, or indeed who was in it. The level of secrecy, especially during 1940, was understandably high.

Into the bunkers

Once the invasion had started, and the enemy had reached their area, each Patrol member would leave home and head straight to their Operational Base (OB), a secret underground bunker built with heavily disguised entrances.

Initially OBs tended to be built by the Patrols themselves. However, unless the particular expertise needed to build such a bunker happened to be within the Patrol, these tended to be not hugely successful – with some Patrols discovering the difficulty of breathing underground without ventilation.

COLESHILL HOUSE – TRAINING HQ

Early training was undertaken by each intelligence officer, supported by disguised training manuals, which at first sight appeared to be innocent calendars, or farming handbooks

In late 1940, Gubbins moved his HQ from Whitehall, to Coleshill House in the small hamlet of Coleshill on the Oxfordshire/Wiltshire border. Coleshill was also used as the training centre for Patrols throughout the country. Such was the secrecy that surrounded the Auxiliary Units, that those attending courses were instructed to get a train to the nearby town of Highworth, and told to report to the local Post Office, where they had to give the postmistress, Mabel Stranks, a password. She would then call Coleshill House who would send a vehicle, which would drive a convoluted route back to the stately home before off-loading the volunteers. Such was the seriousness with which Mabel took her role, when Montgomery came to visit, he too was subjected to the same vetting process and forced to wait sometime while she confirmed his credentials.

When the Auxiliaries reached Coleshill House, they spent weekends training in all aspects of sabotage and guerrilla warfare. Navigating through the countryside at night, explosives training, unarmed combat, firing ranges, learning to be comfortable staying in OBs, and much more. A core training staff stayed in the house with the Auxiliaries billeted in the stables. The training was of the highest level, much more so than the regular Home Guard. Many of the techniques learnt by the Auxiliaries were also passed onto the Special Operations Executive (SOE) later in the war (Gubbins and Fleming were to leave the Auxiliary Units at the end of 1940 to start SOE). Indeed, some Auxiliaries were recruited into the SAS due to their high level of training and aptitude.

Picture of Coleshill House taken by photographer Charles Latham

Source: Wiki / PD

A member of the British Home Guard equipped with a revolver, 21 September 1940

© Getty

Later on, OBs were built by Royal Engineers, brought in from other parts of the country for security reasons. These OBs had disguised hatches that opened through counter-weight mechanisms that led down into a chamber which contained bunks, tables, storage areas, water tanks and sometimes an Elsan chemical toilet and cooker (the smoke from the cooker would disappear through a pipe and into a hollow tree on the surface so the enemy saw no sign of it), along with a large amount of explosives. There was also an escape tunnel giving the Patrol members a chance to get away if a German patrol discovered the OB. The OBs were similar in design to Anderson shelters and Nissen huts, with curved elephant iron and concrete blocks. There was often a blast wall at the bottom of the entrance shaft, in case of a grenade being thrown down the hatch. Despite the better design the OBs remained pretty grim places to stay. Dark and damp, and when on duty there was the constant threat of being discovered and captured or killed.

Many Patrols also had an Observation Post (OP), near the OB, sometimes connected by a telephone wire (up to half a mile away). The OP was designed to allow one member of the Patrol to monitor enemy movement and give the rest of the Patrol a warning if it looked like they were to be discovered. It also meant, that during the day the Auxiliary in the OP could look for potential targets in the local area.

"These men are to have revolvers"

In August, Colonel Gubbins' weekly report to the CIC, which was already read with interest by the prime minister, recommended the issue of revolvers. Churchill added a note, "These men are to have revolvers." Accordingly, 400 .32 Colt automatics were distributed at once and the next month a 100 percent issue of .38 revolvers was made; a remarkable achievement when the country was so low on equipment and weapons. This was followed much later by ammunition that fitted them. These revolvers and the Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knives were of particular source of pride to the Auxiliaries and built their reputation of toughness, certainly in contrast to the often ill-equipped Home Guard.

Patrols were prioritised when it came to the weapons. Thompson sub-machine guns and the Browning Automatic Rifle were both issued in some numbers as were Sten-guns. Also issued was the rather sinister .22 sniper rifle, fitted with a powerful telescopic sight and silencer. The Auxiliaries who received these were told that they were for sniping at high-ranking

"THE KEY TO THEIR SUCCESS WAS SILENCE. THEIR OBJECTIVE WAS TO DESTROY THEIR TARGET, NOT TO GET INTO A RUNNING BATTLE WITH THE ENEMY"

Sandford Levvy Patrol Somerset training

© staybehinds.com

German officers and for picking off tracker dogs before they came too close. Other Auxiliaries have reported that they were to use the weapons to assassinate Britons that were considered collaborators.

Auxiliaries were also issued with close-combat weapons such as garrottes, rubber truncheons, knuckle dusters and knobkerries. These were the Patrols' primary fighting weapons. The key to their success was silence. Their objective was to destroy their target, not to get into a running battle with the enemy.

Alongside close-combat weapons, the other principle materials available to the Patrols were the huge number and variety of explosives. For example, after waiting 20 years for the army to come and collect the ordnance his Patrols had left behind at the end of the war, Captain Reg Sennet, a group leader of five Patrols in Essex, eventually told the police who, in turn called the army. They retrieved, 1,205lbs of explosives, 3,742 feet of delayed action fusing, 930 feet of safety fuse, 144 time pencils, 1,207 L-Delay switches, 1,271 detonators, 719 booby-traps, 314 paraffin bombs, 131 fog signals, 121 smoke bombs, 36 slabs of guncotton and 33 booby-trap switches attached to made-up charges.

Image: Wiki / PD / CC

***Right:** A Fairbairn–Sykes fighting knife from Fort William Museum*

In addition to these explosives Patrols were issued with grenades, including the Mills bomb, the Sticky bomb, Self-Igniting Phosphorous grenades and smoke grenades. It's clear that the Auxiliary Units were prioritised over and above the Home Guard and in some cases the regular army when it came to receiving newly developed weapons and explosives. They were heavily armed and more importantly, very highly trained.

Would the Auxiliaries have been effective?

While undoubtedly Auxiliaries had full confidence in their ability, their weapons and their determination, the debate around how successful they would have been continues. If an invasion had come in 1940, and as we saw later in the war, the Germans dealt with any form of resistance with utmost brutality. How the Patrols would have reacted to their family and friends being executed as a result of their actions, is difficult to say.

Equally, not even the most ambitious Auxiliary could claim that their form of guerrilla warfare could have lasted any real length of time. Inevitably, they would have been caught or killed in a raid or the location of their OB found. The Patrols would and could not have acted in a similar manner to the French Resistance, where a long-term campaign of resistance to occupation was key.

Peter Fleming in his book *Invasion 1940* which came out in 1957, mentions the Auxiliary Units briefly and sums up what he thought their effectiveness might be, "Assuming the British resistance movement would have melted away in the white heat of German ruthlessness, it might have struck some useful blows; and with a bridgehead under heavy counter-attack its diversionary activities would have had a value wholly disproportionate to the number of guerrillas involved."

Never called upon to act in 1940, or throughout the war, many Auxiliaries simply went back to their normal lives when stood-down in November 1944, with most taking the fact that they were highly trained guerrilla fighters to the grave with them.

CART
The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team

The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team researches the Auxiliary Units, their training, equipment, Operational Bases and records all details in the British Resistance Archive

www.staybehinds.com

GUARDING THE HOMEFRONT

'Dad's army' was not a collection of comical amateurs, but a vitally important part of the United Kingdom's defences during World War II

WORDS: **DAVID SMITH**

The Home Guard enjoyed only a brief existence, but within its four-plus years of service it transformed from an ad hoc, poorly equipped collection of units into a force good enough to be entrusted with the bulk of home defence duties as the regular army invaded western Europe.

Always adapting, in response to different requirements and perceptions, the men and women of the Home Guard patiently prepared and waited for the moment when their country would need them. Although that did not materialise in genuine action for the majority, they still provided an invaluable service, and it should never be forgotten that they were training for an extremely dangerous eventuality – an invasion of Britain by the formidable forces of Nazi Germany. The Home Guard had a mission that has not often been understood. Some pointed and laughed at the men who, for one reason or another, were not in the army. They doubted their ability to match Germany's battle-hardened soldiers, but that was never their main purpose.

The Home Guard was tasked with holding up an invading force, slowing down its advance to give time for the limited mobile units available to converge on and destroy the enemy. The men of the Home Guard were not expected to beat the Germans, they were expected to lose, but to lose slowly. It was a brave and selfless role, and those who embraced it deserved more than the disdain they often received.

Early formation

As early as 8 October 1939, Winston Churchill (who was still First Lord of the Admiralty at the time) was posing the following question to Sir Samuel Hoare, "Why do we not form a Home Guard of half a million men over 40 (if they like to volunteer)."

Key to this sentiment was the idea that this should be a volunteer force. In fact, the organisation consequently formed was initially known as the Local Defence

Churchill was always aware of the need to keep morale in the Home Guard high

© Getty

CIVILIAN MILITIAS AROUND THE WORLD

Many countries have fallen back on part-time volunteer forces in times of crisis, with some truly shaping their nation's destiny

Organisations similar to the Local Defence Volunteers have existed in many nations throughout the course of history. Often arising, as in the case of the UK's Home Guard, through a fear of invasion, they have also stemmed from a distaste for large standing armies.

In the fledgling United States, Patriot militia could be called upon whenever British or Loyalist forces appeared in a colony. Training and organisation was rudimentary at best, and George Washington, the commander-in-chief of American forces during the War of Independence, was scathing in his criticism of the system.

The militia, however, was the deciding factor in Britain's defeat at Saratoga in 1777, which drew the French into the war as an ally of the Americans. It also plagued British forces in the southern colonies when the focus of the war switched in the later stages of the conflict.

A distrust of standing armies was also a motivating factor in 19th century Germany, where fear of invasion from France or Russia during the March Revolution of 1848–49 was another spur for the creation of citizen-based organisations. Requesting and receiving armament from the state, these men, numbering in the tens of thousands were variously referred to as 'Communal Watch', 'Security Guard' and 'Citizen's Militia'. Much like the Home Guard, these units never fulfilled their primary purpose, because there were no invasions for them to face up to, and the militias were disbanded in the summer of 1849.

In Australia, the Volunteer Defence Corps directly mimicked the Home Guard, right down to the use of World War I veterans and the limited duties of static defence, observation and guerrilla warfare training.

The need to mobilise the population in the face of an invasion was also the motivating factor behind the planning for a Volunteer Fighting Corps in Japan towards the end of World War II.

Initially envisaged as an unarmed civil defence system, the decision was later made to arm and form a militia. Japan's large population might have seen millions of such fighters confront American invaders had the war not been ended by the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In Switzerland, civilian soldiers are the backbone of the military, with only a limited corps of full-time soldiers. The nation is traditionally neutral in wartime, but around 20,000 eligible males undergo an 18-week training course each year, before taking their place in the ranks of the Swiss Armed Forces. Each soldier is responsible for maintaining his own uniform, equipment and weapon, and much of this is kept at home. The number of men in the Swiss forces has steadily reduced in recent years and currently stands at around 100,000.

Japanese high-school students are put through rifle drills, but Japan's Volunteer Fighting Corps never saw action

© Getty

Volunteers, and was made up entirely of such men. Seldom, in fact, has an organisation's name so fully encapsulated its purpose. The men were volunteers, they would act only in a defensive capacity, and they would remain in their own neighbourhoods, where local knowledge would be an advantage in any confrontation with an invader.

On 14 May, Anthony Eden made a radio broadcast calling for volunteers and within 24 hours 250,000 men had raised their hand. By the end of June, the figure had jumped to 1.5 million. An estimated 50,000 women also served in an unofficial capacity. Inevitably, with such a daunting number of men suddenly needing to be equipped, the Home Guard suffered from serious shortages in its early days, most importantly in one crucial area.

Arming the defenders

On 5 June 1940, only one in three volunteers had been issued with a rifle. A serious shortage of arms and ammunition was threatening to cripple the new force. Arms shipments were expected from the USA and Canada, but until they arrived, improvisation would be required.

Maurice Bradshaw, an 18-year-old volunteer, remembered that "our weapons were bayonets tied to broomsticks, and old rifles, and old 12-bores. And I myself had managed to get hold of a .455 Easy Colt revolver, but I only had five rounds of ammunition".

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Throughout the nation it was a story of units making use of whatever they could find, including shotguns and hunting rifles. The dire situation regarding armaments led to one of the many derisive nicknames being applied to the organisation. Being unable to return fire on the enemy, LDV was claimed to stand for 'Look, Duck and Vanish'. In fact, the spirit of improvisation was strong, and homemade petrol bombs were produced in large quantities, although how effective they could have been is doubtful. Nevertheless, they served one crucial purpose – they prevented the volunteers from feeling useless.

Improvisation also extended to vehicles. Actual military vehicles were in such short supply that civilian lorries and trucks were pressed into service where possible. One LDV unit, based in Middlesbrough, added armour to their lorry in an ingenious manner, using rejected steel plates from the shipping yards.

"The trucks we used were just ordinary, four-wheeled general goods trucks," remembered Guardsman Stanley Brand. "We lined the two long sides with plates, as thick as we could scrounge. And the two ends, we wanted them armoured in case we were the rear [truck]. It was just a case of lining them with whatever we could get."

The situation improved as the war progressed. By 1941, the 100 men of the 2nd Battalion Ely Home Guard had 10 Spigot mortars, 200 anti-tank mines and 200 anti-tank grenades to protect their section of the River Great Ouse at Littleport.

By the end of the Home Guard's existence, its units were very well supplied. Platoon Commander Hawtin Mundy spoke with pride of his men being provided the same .303 Lee Enfield rifles as the men in the front lines, while officers had Sten guns by the end of the war. Mundy's 58-man platoon also had a machine-gun (of World War I vintage but still serviceable), two Spigot mortars and "all the ammunition, as much as I wanted".

Training

Alongside the improved provision of weapons, the Home Guard also benefited from improved training, in line with an ever-changing role. Getting the Home Guard up to speed in military drills was not easy. These were mostly employed men in full-time jobs. After a long day of work, they would turn out to volunteer their time, but it was limited. Service was officially capped at 48 hours a month, although this was often exceeded. It is important to remember that members of the Home Guard did not get an increased rations provision, and exhaustion and war-weariness were real problems, especially as the war progressed.

Training was mostly improvised at first. With veterans filling leadership roles in many units, there was plenty of wisdom to be passed on to what were almost exclusively eager subjects. With the Home Guard made up of volunteers in the early days, the vast majority were motivated and eager to learn. Residential training facilities also began to spring up, notably one at Osterley Park, staffed by veterans of the International Brigades from the Spanish Civil War and former members of the Communist Party. Thousands of men attended camps like this, usually over a weekend.

Training initially focussed on area defence, camouflage and patrolling – the core duties of the Home Guard in the early stages of the war when invasion was a real possibility. Training was often undertaken at section strength, with a section comprising a leader, a deputy commander and between eight and ten men.

***Below**: Guardsmen undergo training in grenade-throwing, under the watchful eyes of a group of MPs*

***Inset, right:** Later in the war, the Home Guard was much better equipped. Here, Guardsmen operate a 'Blacker Bombard' spigot mortar*

This sergeant is lucky enough to have been issued with a Thompson submachine gun

Source: Wiki PD

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Later, training shifted in focus. As the threat of invasion receded, 'active defence' skills were taught. This was also a result of the Home Guard becoming steadily more proficient and capable, but also due to the changing nature of the perceived threat. Rather than attempting to slow down a massive invasion force, the Home Guard would now be expected to track down and destroy small bodies of enemy soldiers engaged in small-scale raids and sabotage missions.

By the end of the war, training may have remained limited, but it often rivalled that of the regular forces when it was provided. Maurice Bradshaw remembered a training exercise in 1944 being "in the same manner as the regular forces". Bradshaw's unit was thoroughly drilled in battlefield conditions. "We had live bombs thrown at us and live ammunition shot over our heads," he remembered, "and we had aircraft dropping bags of flour on us."

The final result of increased experience, better weapons provision and more sophisticated training, was that the Home Guard began to rival regular units in some respects. It is fitting, then, that the organisation was quickly moved to the same system of rank as the regular army.

Home Guardsman Hawtin Mundy had marched into battle with the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry during World War I. In 1944, he reckoned his unit was "better trained, more intelligent, better equipped, and I could almost say equal physically with, I think, the men who went in 1915 with the Bucks".

Duties

Improvement in the proficiency of the Home Guard allowed its men to take on a more integral role in UK home defence as the war progressed. By 1942, they were deemed suitable for guarding so-called 'vulnerable points', important structures such as power stations and telephone exchanges. Their effectiveness would be tested by unannounced mock incursions and sabotage attempts.

"I THINK THE GERMANS WOULD NEVER HAVE HAD SUCH RESISTANCE AS THEY WOULD HAVE HAD IN ENGLAND"

By the end of that year, they were even considered good enough to guard RAF bases. It was a big step up from the early days, when they had been expected to operate behind a hard 'crust' of coastal defences in little more than a sacrificial role, tying up German forces that managed to penetrate the main line of defence, until regular mobile units could react.

Despite this increase in the level of respect the Home Guard received, morale remained a problem throughout the war. This was of concern to the Government, who saw the need for a motivated home defence force and took action where possible.

There was no escaping the fact, though, that the Home Guard never had to fulfil its primary purpose. Despite increasingly taking on more important roles, (7,000 Home Guardsmen were manning coastal defence batteries and 120,000 were operating anti-aircraft guns by the end of 1944), there was still an unfair sense that they had not really been essential.

Working with Civil Defence organisations during bombing raids and guarding bombed-out shops from looters were necessary, even vital duties, but it was not the same as facing German invaders. Morale took an extra hit when conscription was introduced for the Home Guard in the National Service (No. 2) Act of December 1941.

One of the efforts to keep morale as high as possible saw the third anniversary of the creation of the LDV commemorated with a series of parades on 'Home Guard Sunday'. On 16 May 1943, medals were handed out and units demonstrated their skills to an impressed, and possibly surprised, public.

Standing down the guard

The Home Guard never had to defend the United Kingdom against invading German troops, but its contribution to the war effort went much further than merely being there just in case. The regular servicemen freed from duties manning defensive installations were able to take part in offensives overseas (more than 100,000 anti-aircraft gun crew were thus released), and by the time of D-Day, the Home Guard was the main pillar of the UK's defensive system.

The perils of war did not forget the Guardsmen and women. Only a few may have rounded-up downed German pilots, but they faced other dangers. A member of the Home Guard was considerably more likely to die or suffer injury in the UK than a home-based regular soldier, and 1,206 of them were killed in the course of their duties.

Over a thousand battalions had been formed by the time the organisation was officially stood down in late 1944. Although there were hopes that the Home Guard might continue in peacetime, it came to nothing, the fighting spirit of its men should not be doubted. "I think the Germans would never have had such resistance as they would have had in England," said Guardsman Jimmy Taylor. "From every single village and hamlet, every corner, every ditch, every river … They would never have had an inch that they wouldn't have to fight over."

Local Defence Volunteers, distinguished only by an armband and the occasional medal, in 1940

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Las Navas De Tolosa

Christian rivals join forces to campaign against the Almohad Caliphate, during Spain's bloody 'Reconquista'

WORDS **WILLIAM E WELSH**

Three Christian kings in Iberia joined forces against Almohad Caliph Muhammad al-Nasir

OPPOSING FORCES

CRUSADERS

LEADER
King Alfonso VIII of Castile

INFANTRY
22,250

CAVALRY
4,700

VS

ALMOHADS

LEADER
Muhammad al-Nasir

INFANTRY
6,500

CAVALRY
45,000

Source: Wiki PD Art

SOUTH-CENTRAL SPAIN 16 JULY 1212

Fast-riding bands of mounted Christian knights raided Muslim villages, towns, and castles along the Castilian-Andalusian frontier in 1194. The raids were part of offensive operations by King Alfonso VIII of Castile aimed against the Berber Almohad Dynasty. It was a challenge that could not go unanswered by Caliph Abu Yaqub Yusuf.

The following spring the caliph assembled a multi-ethnic caliphal army in North Africa, ferried it across the Strait of Gibraltar and marched north seeking battle with his Christian nemesis.

When word reached Alfonso of the formidable army headed his way, he hastily gathered a large army in Toledo consisting of Castillian and Navarrese knights, warrior-monks of the military orders, and municipal militiamen with which to engage the caliph.

The two hosts clashed on 19 June outside the partially completed Christian hilltop fortress at Alarcos. The Muslim horse archers rained hissing death upon the densely-packed ranks of the Crusader army.

After softening up the enemy with storms of arrows that blackened the sky, the Muslim horsemen systematically began carving up Alfonso's army. To save the remainder of his army, Alfonso negotiated an agreement with Caliph Yusuf.

He agreed to pay an enormous sum of gold if allowed to safely withdraw the remnants of his badly bloodied army. Leaving behind a dozen hostages to guarantee payment, the Christian commander returned to the safety of Toledo's sand-coloured walls. After his victory, Yusuf took the Islamic honorific al-Mansur, meaning 'the one who is victorious'.

The Almohad victory at Alarcos so unnerved Alfonso that he did not conduct offensive operations against the Almohads for a decade and a half. During that period, the Almohads conquered many of the towns and fortresses south and west of Toledo. Muslim raiders even burnt the lush vineyards surrounding the city.

By the early 8th century, the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate had wrested control of the Iberian Peninsula from the Visigoths and established a Muslim-ruled domain known as al-Andalus.

Although resistance by the non-Muslim peoples occurred almost immediately, it would not be until the 11th century that the Christian states of the north were able to begin recapturing territory in the peninsula in what became known as the Reconquista. In the mid-11th century the Berber Almoravid Dynasty had supplanted the Umayyads.

The Almoravids were in turn destroyed in the early 12th century by another Berber dynasty, known as the Almohads.

"A LONG HISTORY OF CONFLICT AMONG THE CHRISTIAN KINGDOMS COMPLICATED THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SITUATION IN NORTHERN IBERIA"

Although the Kingdom of León had spearheaded and directed the Reconquista in its initial period, Castile had emerged in the early 12th century as the dominant Christian power in the war against the rival Muslims.

Previously a frontier province of the Kingdom of León, Castile stood to become the most powerful kingdom in Iberia should it eventually come to retake southern Iberia.

But that was a long way off. In the second half of the 12th century, the Christian kingdoms were thrust on the defensive by Almohad aggression under gifted commanders.

Alfonso VIII had inherited the throne of Castile when he was just two years old in 1158 and during his long minority Castile was highly vulnerable to Almohad offensives.

Alfonso VIII of Castile

Source: Wiki PD Art

16 July 1212

Christian forces join with rival armies in a turning point of the Reconquista

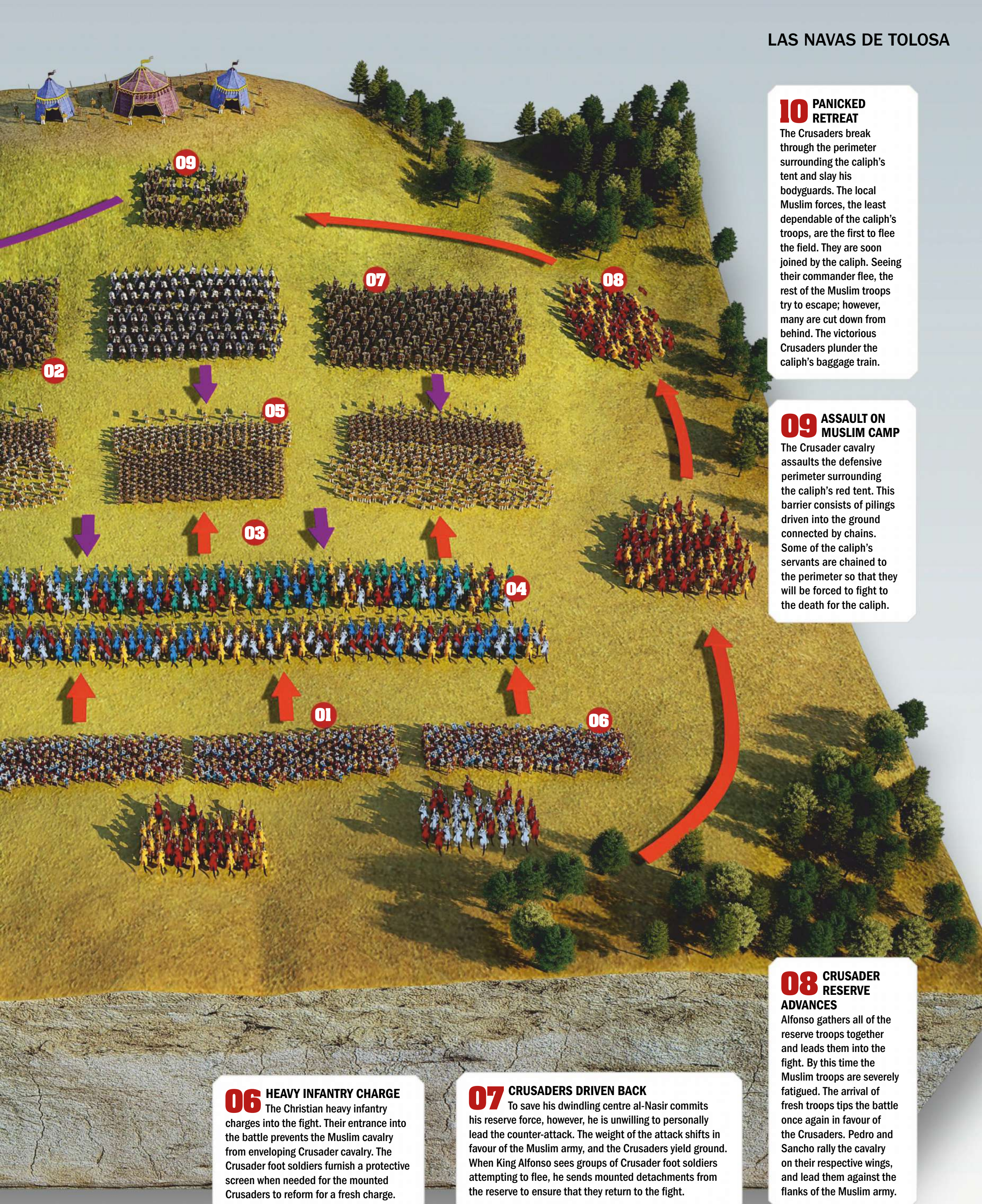
01 CRUSADER FORMATION
The Crusaders form up in three sections with heavy cavalry in the front ranks and heavy infantry in the rear ranks. At the back of each section is a reserve led by a king and his retainers. King Sancho VII leads the Navarrese right wing, King Pedro II leads the Aragonese left wing, and King Alfonso VIII leads the Castilian centre. Alfonso's plan calls for the cavalry to charge first and the heavy infantry to charge second.

02 MUSLIM CONFIGURATION
Caliph Muhammad al-Nasir deploys his light infantry at the front of his army. Behind them are deep ranks of Muslim light and medium cavalry. The light cavalry is positioned in the centre and the medium cavalry is stationed on each wing. Al-Nasir and his palace horsemen constitute a reserve stationed behind the army. Al-Nasir's plan calls for his swift medium cavalry to envelop the slower Christian heavy cavalry.

03 MISSILE ATTACK
The battle begins when the Muslim light infantry advance against the Crusader cavalry. After moving within range, the slingers, javelin throwers and bowmen fire on the enemy cavalry. Their weapons have little impact on the well-armoured Crusaders.

04 MOUNTED SHOCK CHARGE
The Crusaders respond to the missile attack by launching a headlong charge. The Muslim foot soldiers try to flee, but quickly become pinned between the enemy cavalry and the friendly cavalry behind them.

05 DEEP PENETRATION
Cavalry of both armies stationed on the wings engage the horsemen opposite them. Although the Muslim horse in the centre attempts to engage the Crusader horsemen, they are unable to launch an effective attack with the Muslim foot soldiers in the way. Pressing their attack, the Castilian knights in the centre drive deep into the Muslim centre.



10 PANICKED RETREAT
The Crusaders break through the perimeter surrounding the caliph's tent and slay his bodyguards. The local Muslim forces, the least dependable of the caliph's troops, are the first to flee the field. They are soon joined by the caliph. Seeing their commander flee, the rest of the Muslim troops try to escape; however, many are cut down from behind. The victorious Crusaders plunder the caliph's baggage train.

09 ASSAULT ON MUSLIM CAMP
The Crusader cavalry assaults the defensive perimeter surrounding the caliph's red tent. This barrier consists of pilings driven into the ground connected by chains. Some of the caliph's servants are chained to the perimeter so that they will be forced to fight to the death for the caliph.

06 HEAVY INFANTRY CHARGE
The Christian heavy infantry charges into the fight. Their entrance into the battle prevents the Muslim cavalry from enveloping Crusader cavalry. The Crusader foot soldiers furnish a protective screen when needed for the mounted Crusaders to reform for a fresh charge.

07 CRUSADERS DRIVEN BACK
To save his dwindling centre al-Nasir commits his reserve force, however, he is unwilling to personally lead the counter-attack. The weight of the attack shifts in favour of the Muslim army, and the Crusaders yield ground. When King Alfonso sees groups of Crusader foot soldiers attempting to flee, he sends mounted detachments from the reserve to ensure that they return to the fight.

08 CRUSADER RESERVE ADVANCES
Alfonso gathers all of the reserve troops together and leads them into the fight. By this time the Muslim troops are severely fatigued. The arrival of fresh troops tips the battle once again in favour of the Crusaders. Pedro and Sancho rally the cavalry on their respective wings, and lead them against the flanks of the Muslim army.

Eve of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa

Source: Wiki / PD / Creative Commons

To prevent the loss of Toledo during this period, his uncle, King Fernando II of León, sent troops to garrison the city.

When Alfonso attained his majority in 1169, he continued the policy previously established of relying on the native Iberian military orders, such as the Orders of Alcantara, Calatrava, and Santiago, to defend the Castilian-Andalusian frontier.

A long history of conflict among the Christian kingdoms complicated the political and military situation in northern Iberia. The kings squabbled over who had the right to various frontier castles and these squabbles led to frequent armed clashes. If Castile, León, and Aragon were to succeed in defeating the Muslims, they would have to find some way to avoid having distracting small wars against each other.

Alfonso achieved considerable success in his early campaigns against the Almohads. While Almohad forces were busy campaigning west of the Tagus River against Portuguese and Leónese forces in the early 1180s, the young Castilian monarch invaded central al-Andalus besieging Córdoba and capturing Setefilla Castle midway between Córdoba and Seville. But Alfonso remained strictly on the defensive after his crushing defeat at Alarcos.

When Caliph Yusuf died in 1199, he was succeeded by Muhammad al-Nasir. However, it was not until 1209 that Alfonso was ready to resume sustained offensive operations against the Almohads.

The damaging raids, which increased in intensity over a period of two years, eventually provoked a response from al-Nasir. Crossing into Castile with a large host in June 1211, he besieged Salvatierra Castle, which was located approximately 60 miles south of Toledo. Since Alfonso's forces were widely scattered conducting raids, he was unable to assemble them in time to relieve the beleaguered garrison.

"THE VICTORIOUS CRUSADER ARMY DESTROYED MORE THAN HALF OF THE CALIPHAL ARMY AND ACQUIRED GREAT PLUNDER WHEN IT CAPTURED AL-NASIR'S BAGGAGE TRAIN, WHICH CONTAINED GOLD TO PAY HIS TROOPS"

The caliph's army constructed siege engines and positioned them on nearly hilltops.

They pummelled the walls of Salvatierra Castle, ultimately forcing the garrison to surrender after 51 days. Leaving behind a Muslim force to hold Salvatierra, the caliph returned to Marrakesh confident that he would enjoy further success when he resumed offensive operations on the Castilian-Andalusian frontier the following spring.

After his experience at Alarcos, Alfonso knew that he could not take on the much larger caliphal army alone. He needed additional troops, not only from the other Christian kingdoms in Iberia, but also from France and Italy. In response to direct appeals for assistance from Alfonso, Pope Innocent III instructed the prelates of the Christian kingdoms in Iberia, as well as those of southern France, to preach a Crusade that Alfonso would lead against the Almohads.

The pope counselled the Christian kings of Iberia that in order to succeed against the Almohads they would have to stop their infighting and unite against a common foe.

He authorised the prelates to grant the indulgences for remission of sins not only to participants who took up the cross, but also to wealthy individuals who helped finance the expedition. As a result, a substantial number of knights in Poitou, Gascony and Languedoc, as well as northern Italy, made preparations to journey to Toledo to join the Crusade.

The loss of Salvatierra Castle served to galvanise the Christian kingdoms against the Almohads. In spring 1212 the Crusading army began assembling in Toledo. Contingents from Aragon, Navarre and Portugal arrived, as did knights from southern France and Italy.

King Pedro II of Aragon arrived in Toledo with a large body of troops. Although King Sancho of Navarre had sent word that he would participate, he did not arrive in time and Alfonso marched without him. The one Iberian monarch who refused to participate was King Alfonso IX of León. Alfonso IX was unwilling to set aside a long-simmering territorial dispute with Alfonso VIII.

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Alfonso VIII, celebrating the victory at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, 1212, against the Almohads

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Lastly, archbishops Arnaud Amaury of Narbonne, Guillaume Amanevi of Bourdeaux, and Rodrigo Ximenez de Rada of Toledo joined the expedition to furnish spiritual guidance and inspiration.

The Crusaders, who were clad in surcoats emblazoned with the cross, departed Toledo on 20 June marching south toward al-Andalus. Alfonso intended not only to recover frontier castles lost to the Almohads, but also defeat al-Nasir's caliphal army if he offered battle. The French, who marched in the vanguard, sacked Malagon Castle on June 24. The next objective, Calatrava Castle, fell to the Crusaders on 1 July.

A heated dispute arose over the division of the spoils from the two castles. The French believed that since they had done the bulk of the fighting involved in capturing the castles, they should receive all of the spoils, but the Iberian troops disagreed. When the resolution was not to the satisfaction of the French Crusaders, all but the 130 Narbonese knights led by Archbishop Arnaud departed for home in anger. The Italians also used the episode as an excuse to bow out. The timely arrival, however, of King Sancho with around 200 Navaresse knights served to offset the losses incurred by the departure of the foreign Crusaders. The upside of the departure of the French and Italians was that the glory "would be credited to the famous Spaniards and not to the northerners," wrote the anonymous author of the *Latin Chronicle of the Kings of Castile* between 1217 and 1239.

Unwilling to squander precious time besieging the strong Muslim garrison holding Salvatierra Castle, Alfonso bypassed it. He intended to cross the Sierra Morena Mountains into the heart of al-Andalus. Two days after the Crusaders set forth from Toledo, Caliph al-Nasir led his caliphal army north from Seville. Marching northeast, al-Nasir led his army past Córdoba and then turned north into the desolate Sierra Morena Mountains. The long Almohad column ascended into the Muradal Pass where it bivouacked to await the enemy's next move. The Muslim troops fanned out into the high ground on both sides of the pass. By blocking the pass, al-Nasir sought to prevent the Crusaders from reaching Almohad territory in the Guadalquivir basin to the south.

On 12 July, Alfonso reached Muradal Pass only to find it strongly held by al-Nasir's army. Alfonso had a stroke of good fortune when his scouts found a local shepherd who volunteered to lead the Crusaders through a hidden pass west of the Muslim position. Moving in a thin column through the narrow defile, the Crusaders debouched into Mesa del Ray having turned the Muslim army's left flank. At that point, al-Nasir had little choice but to counter-march to contest the Crusader advance into the heart of al-Andalusia.

The caliph redeployed his army in the southern foothills of the Sierra Morena, hoping to force a battle with the smaller Crusader army. The terrain was far more rugged than the field of battle at Alarcos. The land consisted of rocky hills criss-crossed with steep ravines. The two armies came within sight of each other on 13 July. They spent the next two days involved in peace negotiations. Both sides deployed for battle on 16 July.

Alfonso's forces consisted of heavy cavalry and heavy infantry. Both were clad in mail, wore helmets, and carried shields. The Crusader horsemen were armed with lances and swords, whereas the foot soldiers had spears and axes. In contrast, al-Nasir's army consisted of mostly infantry and archers, although there also were also horse archers and some medium cavalry. The Muslim foot soldiers carried swords, spears, maces, axes, and bows. The wide, open terrain of the plateau considerably favoured the powerful Crusader cavalry over the lighter Muslim cavalry.

In the decisive battle that unfolded on 16 July, al-Nasir was outfought by the more experienced Crusader commander.

The victorious Crusader army destroyed more than half of the caliphal army and acquired great plunder when it captured al-Nasir's baggage train, which contained gold to pay his troops. The Almohad Dynasty, racked by internal dissension, would not survive the 13th century.

The victory solidified Castilian control over central Iberia and put the Muslims in al-Andalusia on the defensive for the remainder of the Reconquista. Alfonso, who was astute enough to press his advantage, pushed his frontier 75 miles south to the Guadiana River.

Although Alfonso VIII died in 1214, his successors would complete the conquest of al-Andalus in 1249. This left the Kingdom of Granada as the only remaining Muslim-ruled realm in Iberia. It would fall to a fu ture Castillian queen, Isabella, and her husband Ferdinand II of Aragon, to conquer it and complete the Reconquista.

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he Avro Lancaster was one of the most famous aircraft of WWII. A heavy bomber with a crew of seven, the Lancaster was capable of carrying 33,000 lbs (15,000 kilograms) of explosives. A mainstay of RAF Bomber Command, it was the most successful bomber of the conflict. Sir Arthur Harris, commander-in-chief of Bomber Command, referred to the Lancaster as his "shining sword" and also the "greatest single factor in winning the war". Nevertheless, this accolade came at a heavy price.

Of the 7,377 Lancasters that were built, more than half were lost to enemy or training accidents. More tragically, of the 125,000 men who served in Bomber Command, over 55,000 were killed, 8,400 were wounded and 10,000 became prisoners of war in raids over Europe. These horrendous figures were also marred by criticisms, both then and now, of the mass bombing strategy that Bomber Command committed against Nazi Germany to destroy its fighting capability.

Nevertheless, the endurance and heroism of the men and women of Bomber Command is the subject of John Nichol's new book *Lancaster: The Forging Of A Very British Legend. The Sunday Times* bestselling author of *Spitfire*, Nichol is not just an writer but also an RAF veteran who served for 15 years. While on active duty as a navigator during the Gulf War in 1991, his Tornado bomber was shot down during a mission over Iraq. Along with the Tornado's pilot, John Peters, Nichol was captured and tortured as a prisoner of war. During his captivity, he was paraded on television by his Iraqi captors, which drew worldwide condemnation and became one of the enduring images of the conflict.

Following Peters' and his release at the end of the Gulf War, Nichol has become a writer with many of his books being histories of WWII. *Lancaster* is his 16th book and is a tribute to the heroic crews and support teams who kept the famous aircraft flying.

A symbol of courage

***What was the inspiration behind writing* Lancaster?**

I have been involved with Bomber Command veterans for many years. When I was in the RAF in the 1980s-90s there many of those veterans around and their story wasn't that big a deal, curious though that it is to say. However, I got to know them more after my experiences in the Gulf War. Because I was shot down, myself and the other half-dozen RAF POWs became part of the RAF Ex-Prisoners of War Association. All the members, apart from us from the Gulf War, were WWII POWs. Some had been on the Great Escape and on the death marches at the end of the war. It was a great honour to be part of their group.

I've consequently known these people for years but over time their numbers have diminished and there are now very few alive. After the success of my *Spitfire* book, I was looking for another idea to record the memories of that specific group of people. Lancaster allowed me to tell their stories and write something to commemorate them.

What is it about the Lancaster that makes it so resonant in the British national psyche?

It was an incredible part of the war effort. Other aircraft like the Handley Page Halifax are cited but they never enjoyed the same status as the Lancaster. During the war, people didn't really concentrate on the aircraft – it was in the post-war period when they looked at what it had done. Of course, there were famous films like *The Dam Busters* and people concentrated on specific things that they could hold on to. The Lancaster has become a symbol of Britain's war, survival and the courage of the men and women in Bomber Command.

Do you have any favourite facts about the Lancaster from the book?

I don't write technical books per se. My joy comes from the human stories that are linked to the machine. Over 7,000 Lancasters were

An RAF night bombing photo over Germany with Lancasters pictured far below

Flying Officer J. B. Burnside, a flight engineer in 619 Squadron, checks settings on the control panel from his cockpit seat at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, c.1943

“THE LANCASTER HAS BECOME A SYMBOL OF BRITAIN’S WAR, SURVIVAL AND THE COURAGE OF THE MEN AND WOMEN IN BOMBER COMMAND”

RAF ground crew return a V-sign to a neighbouring searchlight crew among the silhouette of a parked Lancaster, May 1945

© Getty

built and over half were lost during the war and out of the 125,000 men of Bomber Command, just over 55,000 died. That's an astonishing figure because it meant that almost half of Bomber Command died. Can you imagine any government during more recent conflicts saying, "We lost half of our force"? It would bring a government down today but that was just in Bomber Command during WWII, never mind the army or navy.

How dangerous was it to fly in Lancasters?
If you served in Bomber Command you had a 40 percent chance of surviving the war unscathed. If you also consider the considerable mental toll, that's an incredible figure. I can't think of any other military unit during the war that lost half of its force. On a human level it was an absolute tragedy but it was what was required to fight the war.

People have forgotten the reality of what that meant because Bomber Command sent people out on a nightly basis. The army and navy did not conduct a major engagement for every day of the war but Bomber Command embarked on a mass battle that required constant fighting.

The other figure that comes to mind is that people rightly talk about the bravery and losses of Fighter Command because it's one of those things that sticks in peoples' minds. However, Bomber Command lost more men in one night over Nuremberg in March 1944 than Fighter Command lost during the whole of the Battle of Britain.

"IF THE REAR GUNNER WAS AT 20,000 FEET HE WAS FLYING EXPOSED IN THE FREEZING COLD THAT COULD BE -30 OR -40 DEGREES"

What was the worst role in the aircraft?
The rear gunner was isolated and almost sticking out in the open in his Perspex bubble. He was only connected by the intercom and was really exposed whereas the other crew members at least had a little bit of human contact. Even if you were the navigator behind a curtain in dim light with the flak going off, you could still put your head around the curtain and smile at somebody.

The Lancaster was not like the pressurised aircraft you go on holiday in today. If the rear gunner was at 20,000 feet he was flying exposed in the freezing cold that could be -30 or -40 degrees while hanging off the end of the aircraft. It was a lonely place to be.

What was it like to interview veterans for the book?
It can be quite tricky. Many shrug and say, "We just got on with it". You first have to gain their trust and respect. In some ways, I'm in a unique position in that when I interview a WWII veteran they also want to know about my experiences. Without trying to blow my own trumpet, they know they're talking to somebody who kind of understands.

For me, it is about getting them to open up because it's not true that they simply 'got on with it'. Some were hardy folk and didn't give death and fear a huge amount of thought but when you got to know most of them, they started to talk. They talked about fear, loss and especially the imagery such as when empty beds would be cleared of possessions after aircrew were killed.

That is the imagery of death. The veterans would never say something like, "So and so bought it and wasn't coming home". Taking someone's possessions away is a really potent image of sacrifice. For me, that's the key – getting them to talk about what it was like. There are many stories in the book of fear and terror but there are also stories of fun, laughter and love.

How much have women's contribution to the Lancaster story been neglected?
None of the women's roles during WWII have been particularly well recognised such as the Air Transport Auxiliary women who delivered the aircraft. They wouldn't just deliver single-engine fighters like the Spitfire but also giant bombers. They would fly them around the country with little training on instruments or emergency procedures. When a giant bomber like a Wellington, Halifax or Lancaster landed and a woman got out, it was unbelievable. The people on the ground would ask, "Where are the rest of the crew?" The woman would reply, "There are none".

There were also all the women who worked on the ground from the drivers, intelligence and those who did the debriefing. It would come down to simple things like the women who served food but they were right at the heart of Bomber Command too. They watched their friends and colleagues disappear overnight. The women's role was incredibly important and it's kind of been forgotten.

Comparing notes

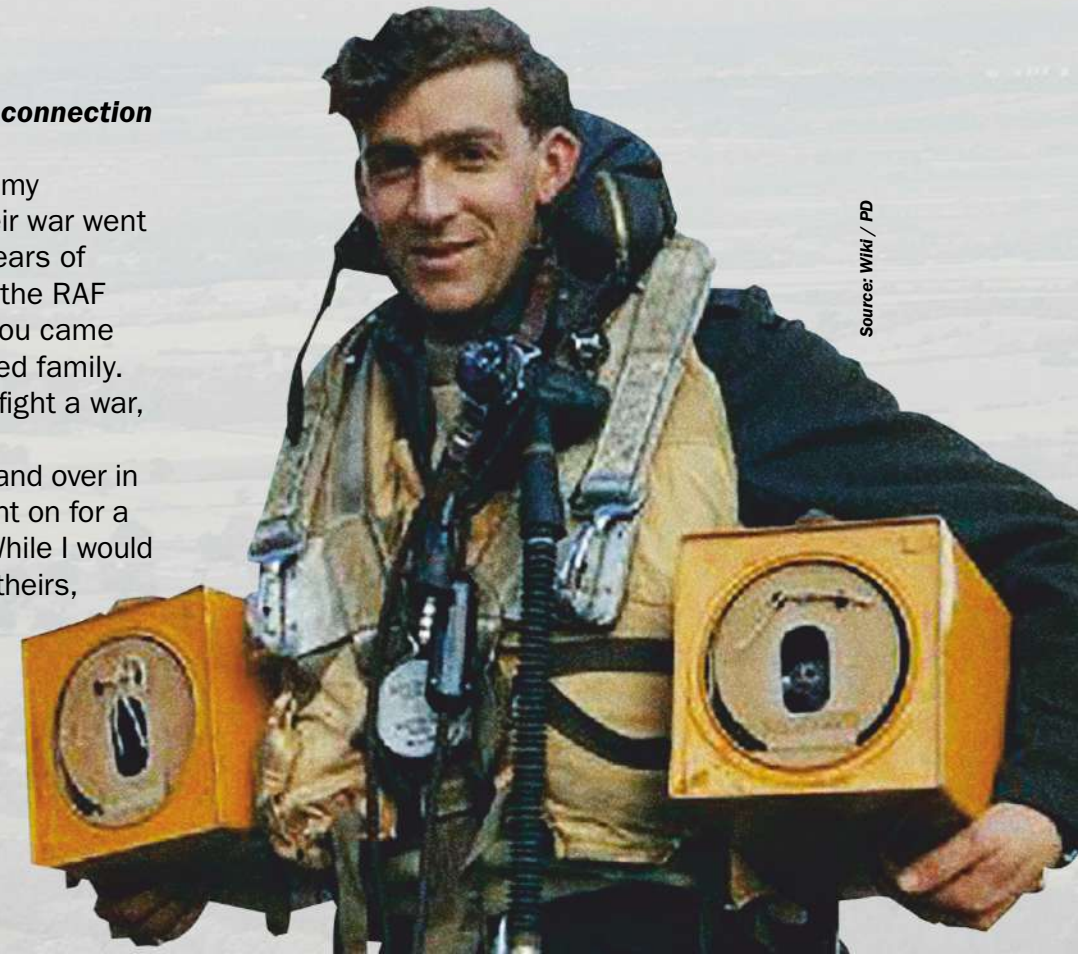
As a fellow airman, did you feel a connection with the veterans?
I don't think I could ever compare my experiences with theirs in that their war went on for so long. Those relentless years of conflict were tough. If you were in the RAF you would fly over Europe before you came home and went to the pub or visited family. That was a mentally tough way to fight a war, particularly in its restless nature.

My own war was intense, direct and over in a matter of weeks. For them, it went on for a huge portion of their young lives. While I would never compare my experiences to theirs, I do understand what it is like to put your life on the line and see friends die. That does give you a bit of an insight into their lives.

Avro Lancaster PA474 is escorted by a Hawker Hurricane as part of the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. PA474's colours are designated to 460 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force

Below: Pilot Officer A. S. Jess, a Canadian wireless operator, carries two pigeon boxes. Homing pigeons served as a means of communication in the event of a crash, ditching or radio failure

To what extent did the history of WWII influence your decision to join the RAF?
WWII wasn't an interest and I didn't even do a History O-Level at school. I had no historical context for joining the military at all. However, *Lancaster* is my 16th book so how things have changed! When I joined the RAF in 1981 people didn't speak about war



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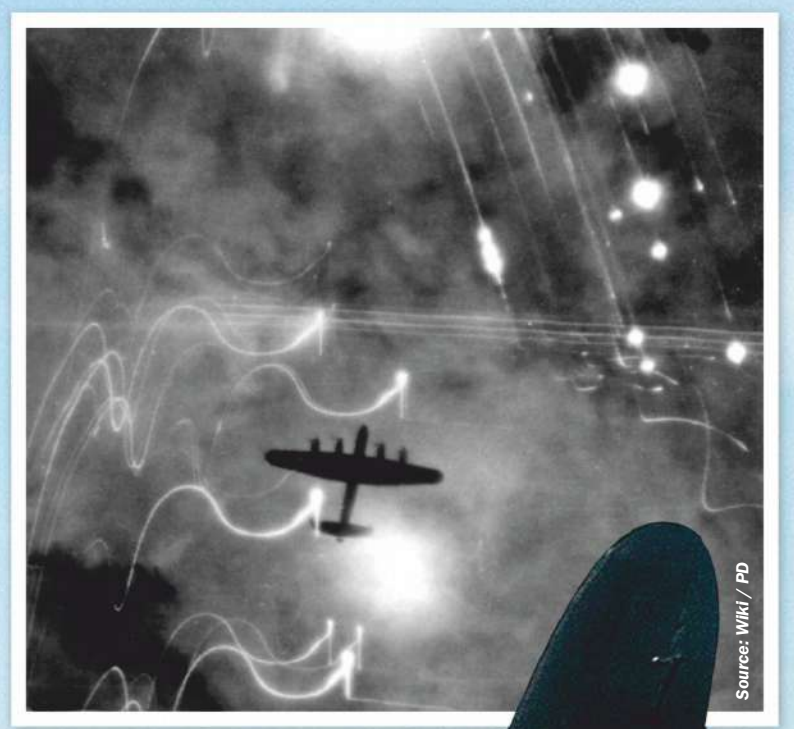
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Right: A Lancaster is photographed during the chaos of a raid over Hamburg at night

© Getty

Elsie Yates works on the nose of a Lancaster, 16 April 1943

per se. At that time, you joined the military for a career or way of life.

When I joined the ranks as a technician I never had any thoughts of war at all. It was different for the men of WWII. They joined at a time of war and knew what they were getting into although they often didn't know the harsh realities. I definitely didn't think that and just joined for a trade but things clearly turned out differently!

How did the role of a navigator in a Lancaster compare to navigating a Tornado?

I was a technician from 1981-86 and then started my navigator training. Interestingly, the training was really old-fashioned back in the 1980s. You still plotted on a desk and there was no GPS. You would plot tracks using time, distance and wind on a map. The training was probably very similar to the way Lancaster navigators did it.

Clearly, when you flew in a Tornado it was very different. When I got onto it in 1988 it was a modern, tactical nuclear bomber and had inertial navigation. It could tell you where you were most of the time and there was radar. In the Tornado, the pilot and navigator did all of the combined jobs that a seven-man Lancaster would have done.

The way that a Tornado worked couldn't compare to a Lancaster in those terms but the training was still certainly very old-fashioned. Of course, the Tornados that were retired in 2019 were also a completely different beast to the one I flew. For want of a better expression, the way an aircraft works marches on with time.

Do you think you could have navigated in a Lancaster?

I couldn't do it now but I reckon that when I was doing my basic training I could have had a bash at it. I'm not sure I would have been particularly good with the flak over Berlin or Munich to be honest. However, I could have possibly got away with it on a training sortie in the UK.

Many Lancaster airmen were shot down and captured. With your own story, how much could you relate to their experiences?

I think that the experiences of captivity were different in that John Peters and I were captured by a brutal regime that knew no bounds and could do anything to us for their own means. That was not the same for the vast majority of captured Bomber Command veterans. Some did have horrific experiences such as a veteran in the book whose friends were murdered by German civilians and there are a number of similar accounts. The Great Escape is one of a couple of different instances where that didn't happen but their POW experiences were very different to my own. For instance, some lived in captivity for four or five years. However, for the most part POWs were reasonably well treated as best as they could be in the circumstances.

To what extent do you think the carpet bombing that the Lancaster represented would be applicable in modern warfare?

It wouldn't be because by today's standards that kind of warfare is unacceptable and a war crime. When we went to war against Iraq to liberate Kuwait, the Allies did not simply bomb huge swathes of Iraqi territory because it would have been wrong. During WWII, it was the only way of waging war. If you were going to attack the industrial centre of Hamburg there was no means of dropping one heavy bomb on a particular target. The only way was to attack huge swathes of the area around where you trying to destroy. It would be completely unacceptable now but it was the only way of waging war in the 1940s.

Source: Wiki PD Gov

USAF aircraft fly over retreating Iraqi forces and burning oil fields in Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm

© Alamy

Inset (above) Nichol flew as a navigator with pilot John Peters (foreground) when they were shot down and captured during the Gulf War. They later co-wrote about their experiences in the book Tornado Down

Would you have felt a similar sense of pressure before missions in the Gulf War that Lancaster crews would have felt?

The guys in WWII were constantly conducting missions whereas we weren't. But, in general terms, their fear was not getting the job done. They didn't want to let their crewmates down and that was actually a very similar feeling to what everybody would describe during the Gulf War. You didn't want to let anybody down in your squadron. I imagine those feelings were certainly similar and of course on our first few nights we were venturing into the unknown. When we were in the Tornado, nobody in the RAF had been into battle in that way in modern times, which was a low-level attack over a heavily defended airfield. I suspect that sense of going into the unknown was probably similar too.

Controversies and commemoration

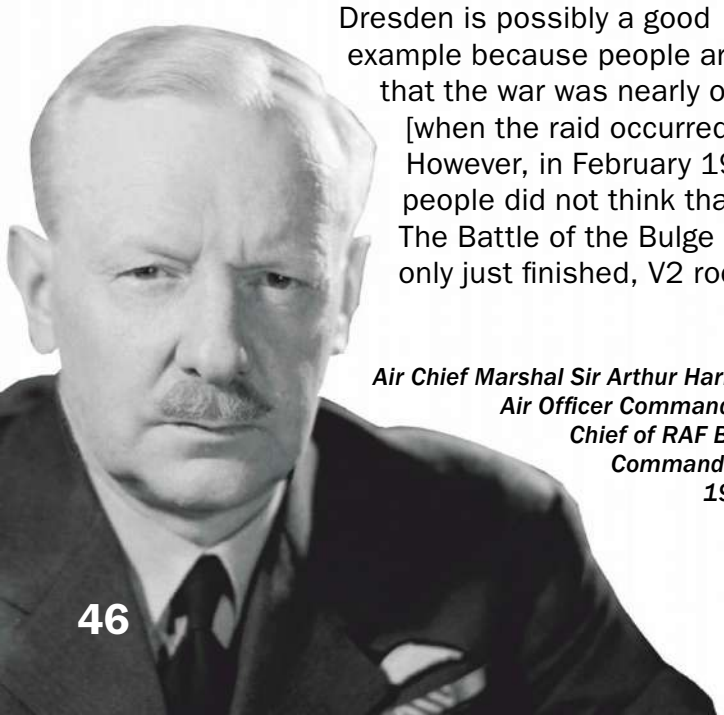
To what extent do you think the Lancaster's reputation is compromised by the strategy of Bomber Command?

It depends what your views are. There are many myths and inaccuracies that have built up around Bomber Command's strategy. Figures are inflated and people's reasoning can be factually incorrect or made with hindsight.

Dresden is possibly a good example because people argue that the war was nearly over [when the raid occurred]. However, in February 1945 people did not think that. The Battle of the Bulge had only just finished, V2 rockets were killing thousands and German jet fighters were appearing. There were many signs that the war was not over. In the military, you don't stop fighting because a war might be over soon and Germany had not surrendered.

Dresden was part of that thinking because it was a stronghold, a transport hub and producing armaments. People arguing about Bomber Command's strategy argue with a weapon that was unavailable in the 1940s – hindsight. Nobody had hindsight then because they were fighting for their very survival. There were things that went wrong and were terrible.

Every death was horrific and the descriptions of what happened at Dresden are almost too difficult to come to terms with. However, Britain was fighting an existential threat and when that happens you fight a war until the enemy capitulates.



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Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris was Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of RAF Bomber Command during 1942-45

What is your opinion of Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris?

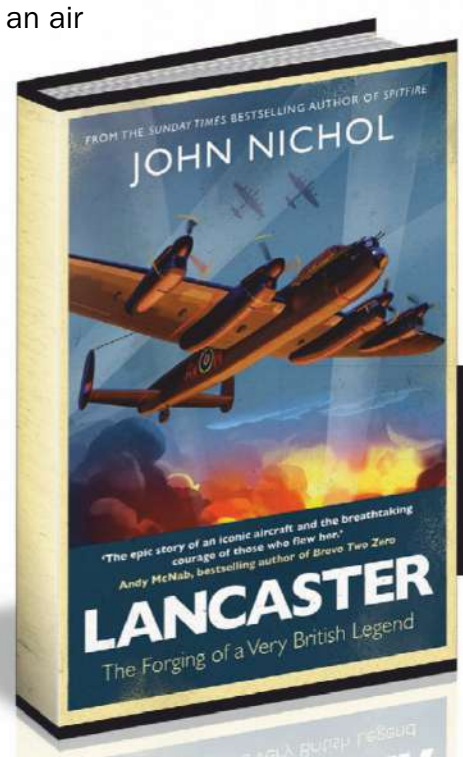
He was controversial figure even then, but not to his men, which is quite interesting. Most would say that they admired him. When you press them on that, what they mean is they came to know and admire him after the war. During the war, if you were at an air station on an operations tour you didn't really know about him and the leadership. You just got on with your job and when you finished the tour you did something else.

Harris was controversial but he was still fighting the war in the best way that he thought at the time. Could you criticise some of his decisions in the aftermath? Of course you can, but criticism can always be found in what someone does afterwards. Harris was in a really difficult position of incredible responsibility and leadership. His campaign to destroy the Germans' ability to wage war was certainly one of the factors of winning the war, there's no doubt about that. Could it have been done differently? Somebody would have to show how it could have been done because the British did not have precision weapons then. Harris was fighting a war with the tools and beliefs that were available to him at the time. In the end, no matter the argument, the war was won.

Some did criticise at the time, and Winston Churchill somewhat abandoned Bomber Command because the controversy was there. But, in general terms, when you are fighting a total war it's always going to be ugly.

Why is it important that should we commemorate the sacrifices of 'The Many' of Bomber Command as well as 'the Few'?

I think we should commemorate both and I don't differentiate between their efforts, courage and skill. The simple fact is that Bomber Command has not had the same recognition although I think that is changing now. If it is important to recognise the actions of 'the Few' in Fighter Command it is equally important to do the same for those tens of thousands of men who fought in Bomber Command.



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MICHAEL JOHN O'LEARY

This Lance Corporal's heroic actions saved the lives of his comrades, capturing or killing ten Germans in the process

WORDS **ANDREW BROWN**

The men fixed their bayonets onto the tip of their rifles and listened to the rattle of machine-gun fire that hammered incessantly above their heads. The position the Germans held was strong; their troops had already repulsed two counter-attacks by the British forces. Many of the casualties sustained in these attacks had been caused by the two machine-gun barricades the Germans had, which were only 55 metres (180 feet) apart. The barricades held five German soldiers each, one to fire the deadly weapon while the others helped feed the ammunition through and pointed out potential targets. The machine-guns could spit out up to 400 deadly rounds a minute and their presence on any battlefield during World War I had the potential to alter an entire battle's balance of power.

The 50 men of the Coldstream Guards and 30 of the 1st Company of the Irish Guards had some sappers with wire cutters and sandbags. These men were trying to succeed where the first two attacks had failed. The Coldstreams went first and charged the 180 metres (600 feet) separating them from the German trench. Peppered with fire, their charge began to falter. The Irish Guards rushed to join them and raced toward the enemy, but there was one among them who quickly outpaced the rest. This figure was Lance Corporal Michael O'Leary.

"NO WRITER OF FICTION WOULD DARE TO FASTEN SUCH AN ACHIEVEMENT TO ANY OF HIS CHARACTERS, BUT THE IRISH HAVE ALWAYS HAD THE REPUTATION OF BEING EXCELLENT FIGHTERS AND LANCE CORPORAL MICHAEL O'LEARY IS CLEARLY ONE OF THEM"

Arthur Conan Doyle

O'Leary was a keen sportsman from an early age, and particularly excelled in competitive weightlifting and football. Wanting more from life than working on the family's farm, he joined the Royal Navy aged 16 where he initially worked as a stoker. After serving for several years an illness – believed to be rheumatism of the knees – forced him to leave the service and he returned home to Cork. However, he was soon on the move again, joining the Irish National Guard in 1909 and serving with them until 1913. In August that year he emigrated to Canada (a journey that took several weeks) and joined the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

While employed in the Canadian police force he displayed the bravery that would later see him come to international prominence, when he captured two criminals following a long gunfight. O'Leary was commended for his actions,

An artist's impression of O'Leary in action

© Mary Evans

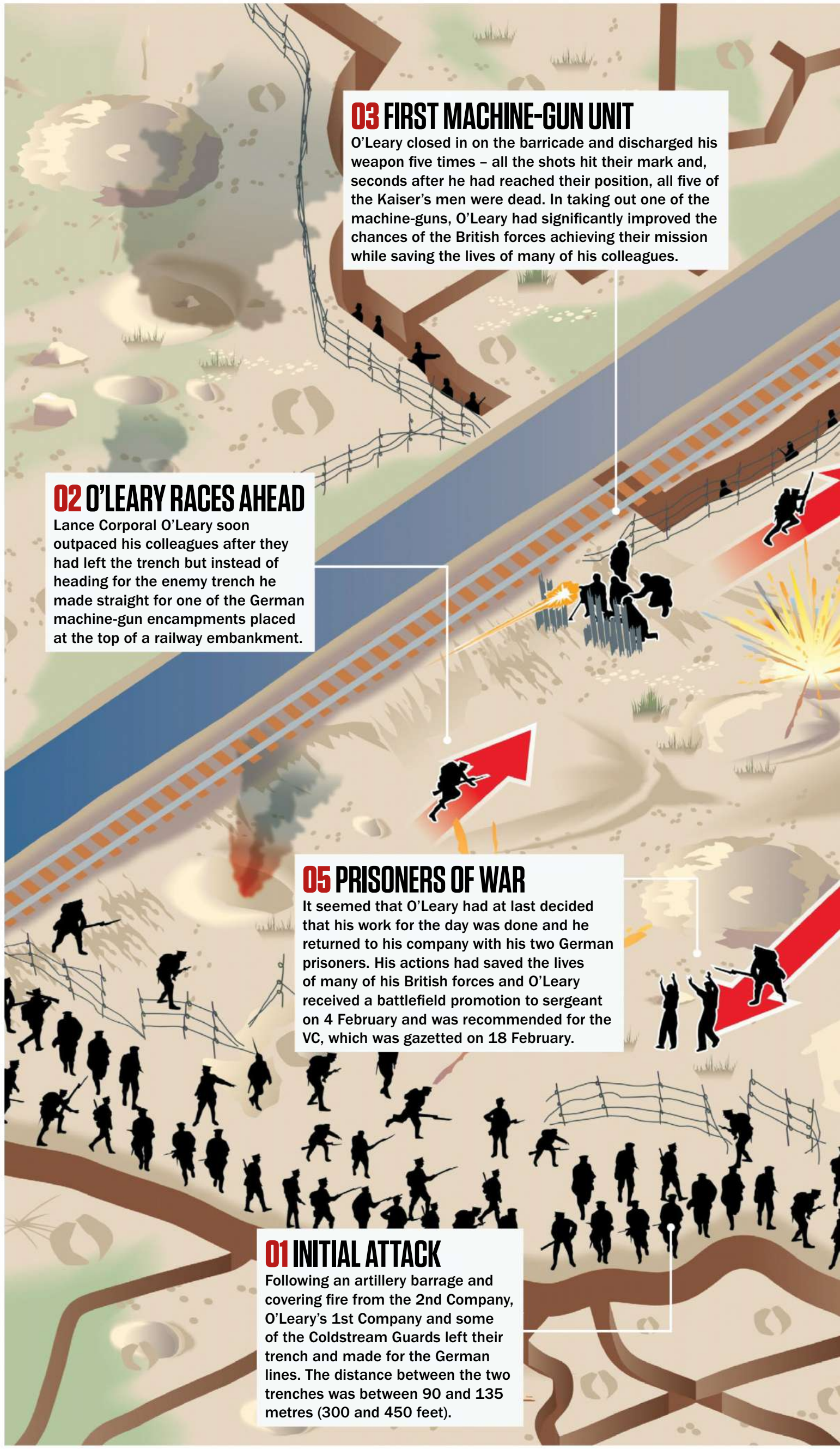
presented with a gold ring and was well thought of by his colleagues. However, he would not stay there long, as at the outbreak of World War I he was given permission to return to Britain to re-join the army. O'Leary and his old regiment, the Irish Guards were sent to the front in November 1914 where they experienced the brutalities and harsh reality of trench warfare.

The Irish Guards were stationed around the La Bassée district in France and were subjected to frequent German bombardments. On the morning of 1 February 1915, the Germans attacked British forces where O'Leary was stationed and pushed them back. The ground they had gained was strategically important – in the grind of trench warfare land was often gained and lost frequently – but this territory had tactical significance and would need to be retaken. The 4th Company of the Irish Guards and the Coldstream Guards attempted to do just that at 4.00am but the German barrage – including that from their two machine-gun encampments – scythed them down. Part of the company did make it back to their own trenches – some limping, some crawling – but the damage had been done.

O'Leary's 1st Company, under the command of Second Lieutenant Innes, were ordered to organise the survivors of the assault party and assist the Coldstream Guards in a second attempt to take back the territory. The British artillery commenced what was at that point one of the conflict's larger bombardments, in order to break down the barbed wire in front of their trenches. Meanwhile, the 2nd Company fired at their enemy to keep them in their trenches and prevent them from being able to return fire. This last point was important because the company were preparing to charge straight at them and O'Leary was about to display staggering bravery.

German soldiers before the first Battle of Marne during WWI, September 1914. The medals on the uniforms suggest that the photo may have been staged

Source: Wiki / PD



03 FIRST MACHINE-GUN UNIT

O'Leary closed in on the barricade and discharged his weapon five times – all the shots hit their mark and, seconds after he had reached their position, all five of the Kaiser's men were dead. In taking out one of the machine-guns, O'Leary had significantly improved the chances of the British forces achieving their mission while saving the lives of many of his colleagues.

02 O'LEARY RACES AHEAD

Lance Corporal O'Leary soon outpaced his colleagues after they had left the trench but instead of heading for the enemy trench he made straight for one of the German machine-gun encampments placed at the top of a railway embankment.

05 PRISONERS OF WAR

It seemed that O'Leary had at last decided that his work for the day was done and he returned to his company with his two German prisoners. His actions had saved the lives of many of his British forces and O'Leary received a battlefield promotion to sergeant on 4 February and was recommended for the VC, which was gazetted on 18 February.

01 INITIAL ATTACK

Following an artillery barrage and covering fire from the 2nd Company, O'Leary's 1st Company and some of the Coldstream Guards left their trench and made for the German lines. The distance between the two trenches was between 90 and 135 metres (300 and 450 feet).

04 OUT OF AMMO

Instead of re-joining the charge, O'Leary made a beeline for the second German machine-gun. The ground in front of it was too marshy and boggy for a direct approach, so he climbed the railway embankment before, for the second time in as many minutes, charging directly at a lethal killing machine discharging hundreds of rounds a minute. Displaying remarkable luck and calm, he fired three shots that put down three Germans. The other two enemy soldiers had no stomach left to fight and raised their hands in surrender, not knowing the Irishman had run out of bullets. His gun held ten bullets and all of them had been expended, eight directly into German flesh.

WHAT O'LEARY DID NEXT

After returning to England to help encourage others to sign up, O'Leary returned to action and served the rest of the war, much of it in the Balkans Campaign. Following Germany's surrender, he returned to Canada where he worked in the police force for several years. He returned to Britain and, remarkably for a man aged over 50, served in WWII as a captain in the Middlesex regiment. Poor health forced him to return from the front line but he still assisted the war effort, taking command of a prisoner of war camp in England. He died in 1961 and his funeral was attended by an honour guard from the Irish Guards. His VC is displayed at the Regimental Headquarters of the Irish Guards.

THE END OF EMPIRES

By August 1945 the great struggle with the Axis powers had come to an end but the world was far from peaceful, particularly in South East Asia. Here, Imperial War Museums' Senior Curator Alan Jeffreys discusses how violent tensions in the region continued in the aftermath of the war

WORDS **ALAN JEFFREYS**

Image: IWM

The burnt-out car of Brigadier Mallaby on the spot where he was murdered on 30 October 1946

The defeat of the British, Indian and Australian forces in Malaya (Malaysia) and Singapore by the Imperial Japanese Army in February 1942 foreshadowed the eventual end of the British Empire in South East and South Asia. The invading Japanese forces of two divisions (reinforced later by the Guards Division), crushed the defending Indian corps of two divisions, one Australian division and the very unlucky British 18th Division, who practically embarked straight away into prisoner of war camps and endured the very harsh conditions of the camps on the Burma-Thailand Railway. The subsequent loss of prestige of the British Empire permeated across Asia, as the defeat's ramifications perceivably included the eventual end of the Indian Army as the protector of British rule in South East and South Asia.

Like the Fall of Singapore – which was the largest surrender in British military history – the equally disastrous retreat from Burma (Myanmar) went down in history as the longest. The Japanese forces had invaded to protect the advances in South East Asia as well as to prevent American supplies getting to China over the Himalayas. The Japanese defeated the defending British, Indian and Chinese armed forces. The real problem was the rapid expansion of the Indian Army (who made up the majority of the defending troops) both in Burma and Malaya as well as the lack of training, particularly for jungle warfare, prior to the Japanese invasion. The expanded Allied forces were under-equipped, under-trained and the long retreat became inevitable.

The next encounter with the Japanese in the Burma campaign was even more disastrous. The ill-fated First Arakan campaign was undertaken with under-trained and demoralised troops presided over by an inefficient command structure. Morale was also undermined by the huge numbers of soldiers affected by malaria and other tropical diseases, with the ensuing problems of evacuating the sick and wounded back to base hospitals.

The lack of experience of fighting in the jungles of South East Asia, together with the rapid expansion of the army, was largely responsible for the disastrous defeats in Malaya, Burma and the First Arakan. Prime Minister Winston Churchill instigated change at the highest level. The Commander-in-Chief India, Field Marshal Wavell, was appointed Viceroy of India. He was replaced by General Claude Auchinleck in June 1943. Operational control now came under South East Asia Command, commanded by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. Later that year General 'Bill' Slim was appointed 14th Army commander and a number of experienced divisional commanders were also appointed. The senior officers were all from the Indian Army, rather than British service, and understood the ways of the army. They were all part of a generation who fought in the First World War, came through the ranks of the Indian Army in the 1930s and were instrumental in adapting the army to be more effective throughout the Second World War in all theatres.

"THE EXPANDED ALLIED FORCES WERE UNDER-EQUIPPED, UNDER-TRAINED AND THE LONG RETREAT BECAME INEVITABLE"

In India, the Infantry Committee convened by Wavell in June 1943 established training divisions where recruits undertook two months' training in jungle warfare after their basic training at the Regimental Training Centres. Jungle Warfare Schools were also established to train units and instructors. For the first time, a comprehensive doctrine was available for fighting the Japanese, the jungle and combating disease. This was encapsulated in the training pamphlet produced by GHQ India entitled 'The Jungle Book'. General Auchinleck ensured that jungle warfare training was the main focus of all training in India.

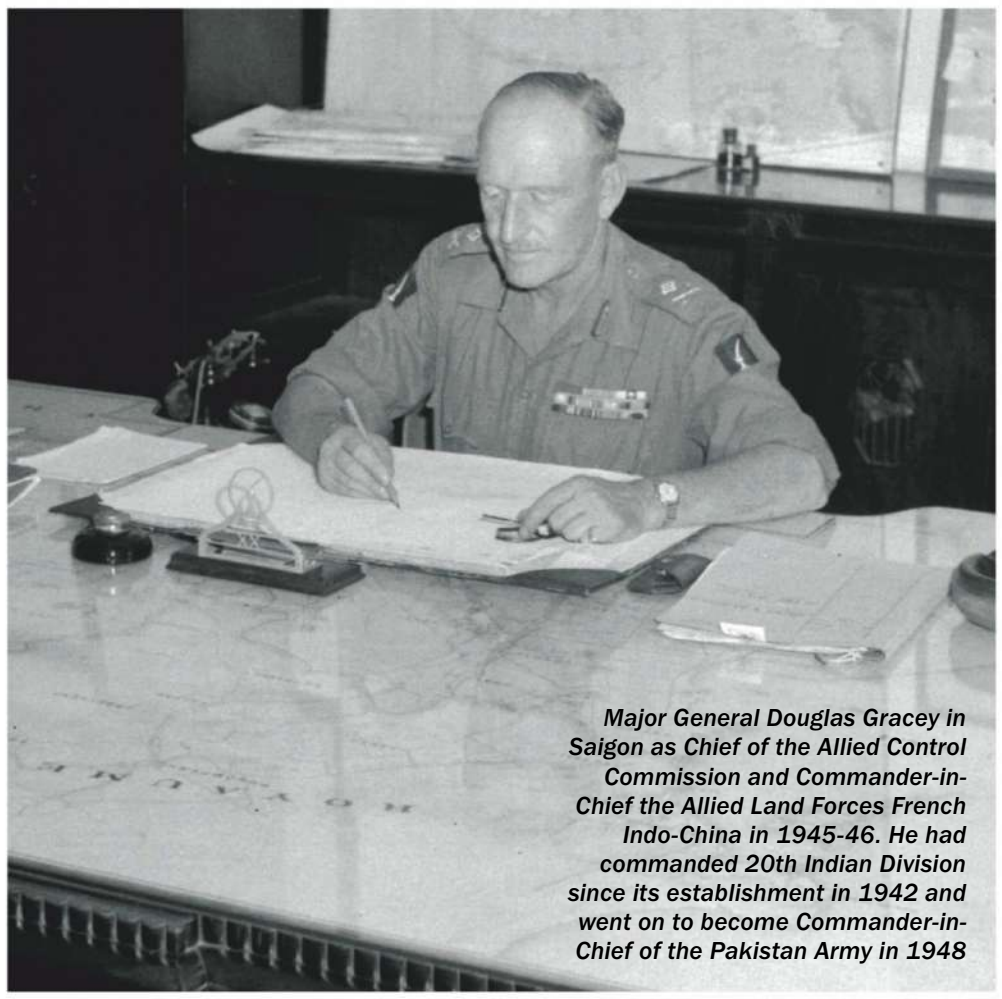
By 1944 the 14th Army and the Indian Army generally was well-trained – and capable of defeating the Japanese in the jungle – by the time the Imperial Japanese Army made its main attack, Operation U-GO, in spring 1944. The prime objective was the speedy capture of Imphal by the Japanese 15th Army, commanded by General Renya Mutaguchi, to forestall the imminent Allied invasion of Burma.

The 14th Army commander, General William 'Bill' Slim, and IV Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Geoffrey Scoones, decided to fight a defensive battle at Imphal due to the terrain and the all-weather airfields at Imphal and Palel. During the battles of Imphal-Kohima, British and Indian soldiers inflicted a crushing defeat on the Imperial Japanese Army. There were 53,505 casualties in the Japanese 15th Army whose overall strength had been 84,280 in contrast to 16,700 casualties in the 14th Army. The fighting bore out the importance of jungle warfare training as well as air superiority, organised logistics and good leadership. It showed what resolute jungle-trained troops, with confidence in themselves and their leaders, could achieve in battle.

The 14th Army prepared for the next phase of the fighting. Slim's plan, Operation Capital, was to defeat the Japanese Burma Army on the Shwebo plain, but it was clear that the Japanese were not of the same mind, and withdrew their forces over the Irrawaddy River. Thus the plan was revised, forming Operation Extended Capital, with IV Corps to cross the river at Nyaungu and XXXIII Corps to cross the river north of Mandalay. The defending Japanese would engage what they thought was the main force at Mandalay while IV Corps would sandwich the Japanese at Meiktila using the hammer and anvil tactics that Slim

Lieutenant M H Jerram RINVR with the gun crew of the Indian sloop NARBADA at Myebon, Burma

Image: Getty



Major General Douglas Gracey in Saigon as Chief of the Allied Control Commission and Commander-in-Chief the Allied Land Forces French Indo-China in 1945-46. He had commanded 20th Indian Division since its establishment in 1942 and went on to become Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army in 1948

Image: IWM

envisaged. The plan worked and 14th Army was able to advance through central Burma and retake the capital, Rangoon (Yangon), on 2 May.

Traditionally Indian Army divisions comprised three brigades of two Indian army battalions and one British army battalion. This changed by 1944-45 due to manpower problems in the British Army. For instance, the 23rd Indian Division by the time of the battle of Imphal only had one British Army infantry battalion and one artillery unit in the whole of the division. Similarly in 1939 the Indian Army was largely officered by British officers. This also changed throughout the Second World War, for example in 1939 there were about 400 Indian officers which had increased to over 15,000 by the end of the war, although none above the rank of Brigadier. In 1945, the Indian Army was a well-trained army that could adapt to changing tactical circumstances. Over two million personnel served in the Indian Armed Forces. All Indian forces, including those who had co-operated with the British Empire, those who chose non-co-operation and those who openly opposed the regime such as the Indian National Army, all combined in ending British rule in India as Britain could no longer sustain the Raj. Thus India's war experience paved the way for eventual independence in 1947.

At the Potsdam conference in July 1945 it was decided that South East Asia Command would be responsible for occupation duties across the region. Indian Army formations helped restore colonial empires in Saigon in French Indo-China (Vietnam) and on Java and Sumatra in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), as well as contributing to the occupation forces in Japan and the British colonies such as Burma and Malaya. Major General Douglas Gracey, as Chief of the Control Commission and Commander-in-Chief Allied Land Forces French Indo-China, and 20th Indian Division arrived in Saigon in early September 1945. The division had fought throughout the Burma campaign in 1944-45, adapting from jungle warfare to open warfare on the plains of Burma and crossing the Irrawaddy River. Gracey commanded the formation from its establishment in 1942 and throughout the campaign. This continuity of command and adaptation to different forms of warfare meant the division was continually learning the lessons from operations which helped the division adapt to its latest task. By the end of the war it was an all Indian Army composition division with the exception of one British Army artillery. Operation Python, initiated in February 1945, saw the release and repatriation of all British soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers who had already undertaken three years and eight months service, which was extended to three years and four months in June 1945.

The British area of occupation was the area south of the 16th parallel – Southern Vietnam, Cambodia and some of Laos. The Chinese Nationalist Army was responsible for northern Vietnam. The division's new role in Saigon, Operation Masterdom, was to establish control, provide support for the French authorities and disarm the Imperial Japanese Army. However the division had minimal intelligence about the Japanese Army in the area let alone the Viet Minh, the resistance movement called the League for the Independence of Vietnam. Until March 1945 the Vichy French had worked alongside the Japanese authorities but Ho Chi Minh had declared independence from the returning French on 2 September 1945.

The 80th Indian Infantry Brigade was the first to arrive in country on 8 September. Gracey imposed martial law on 19 September for which he has been much criticised by historians, even by some people at the time, but it was an impossible situation that 20th Indian Division had been sent to rectify, with the French viewing them as peace enforcers and the Viet Minh seeing them as aiding the French colonial oppressors. In reality, there were insufficient troops which effectively amounted to two battalions in Saigon. Numbers increased when former French prisoners of war were released but they fought those Viet Minh who had guarded them, with the retaliation escalating.

The British Army In Burma, March 1945, The British commander and Indian crew of a Sherman tank of the 9th Royal Deccan Horse, 255th Indian Tank Brigade, encounter a newly liberated elephant on the road to Meiktila, 29 March 1945

© Getty

Atrocities included the death of over 300 French and Eurasian families in north Saigon on 25 September. These incidents led to the use of Japanese troops, sometimes under British command, to take on more offensive roles in containing the violence, until the two remaining brigades in 20th Indian Division arrived in Saigon throughout October and November, along with French forces under General Philippe LeClerc. A smaller number of Japanese soldiers even joined the Viet Minh as military advisors. The division established control in Saigon as well as providing support for the French. By November the soldiers were able to return to their original objective of disarming the Japanese as the French army largely took over internal security roles. Indeed the French officers and men were criticised by Gracey for their colonial and racist attitude towards Indian soldiers.

The battle-hardened 20th Indian Division was able to build on their experience in the Burma campaign on operations against the Viet Minh. For example on the night of 2/3 January 1946 a Viet Minh battalion on a five-pronged well-supported attack tried to take the patrol base of the 14/13 Frontier Force Rifles at Bien Hoa. The Indian and Japanese defenders, however, held them off for no casualties as compared to an estimated 100 Viet Minh killed. This type of fighting was described by the historian of the 9th/14th Punjab Regiment as "an unsatisfactory sort of fighting. The enemy wore no uniform and usually did not carry arms visibly". Between October 1945 and January 1946, the division suffered more than a hundred casualties, 40 soldiers died and 54,000 Japanese troops were disarmed with an estimated 2,000 Viet Minh deaths. The division began to leave Saigon in early February, with effectively the last remaining units gone by the end of March 1946.

"HE REALISED THE RISK HE WAS TAKING AND ACTED IN AN ENDEAVOUR TO SAVE THE COMPANY OF INFANTRY IN THIS AREA, BUT WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF AT LEAST A SECTION OF THE MOB, HIS TASK WAS IMPOSSIBLE"

The Viet Minh associated the British and Indian troops with the French colonial government and some historians view this as the beginning of the first Indo-China war.

Historian Daniel Marston has concluded the British government was unclear what role British and Indian Armies should undertake in the restoration of the colonial empires of their European allies. Indeed as he states, "The other irony is that the new Labour Government, in haste to end the British presence in India, nevertheless saw the Indian Army as an imperial reserve with unlimited abilities to project British power and support for allies, with the added benefit of few casualties to trouble the British electorate."

There were similarities with the situation in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) with a lack of clear direction from both South East Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten and the British government. The role included maintaining control of the main cities until the return of the Dutch even though Dr Sukarno had declared independence on Java on 17 August 1945. Ultimately three Indian divisions were deployed under the command of General Sir Philip Christison as Commander-in-Chief, NEI. He met Jack Lawson, the Secretary of State for War before taking up his post who told him, "Mr Bevin [Foreign Secretary] has asked me to make it quite clear to you that HM Government are determined that nothing should be done to suggest your troops are going to re-impose Dutch Colonial rule. You must not take sides. Carry out your role; it may take up to six

Image: Getty

Children of Singapore cheer the arrival of the 5th Indian Division, 5 September 1945

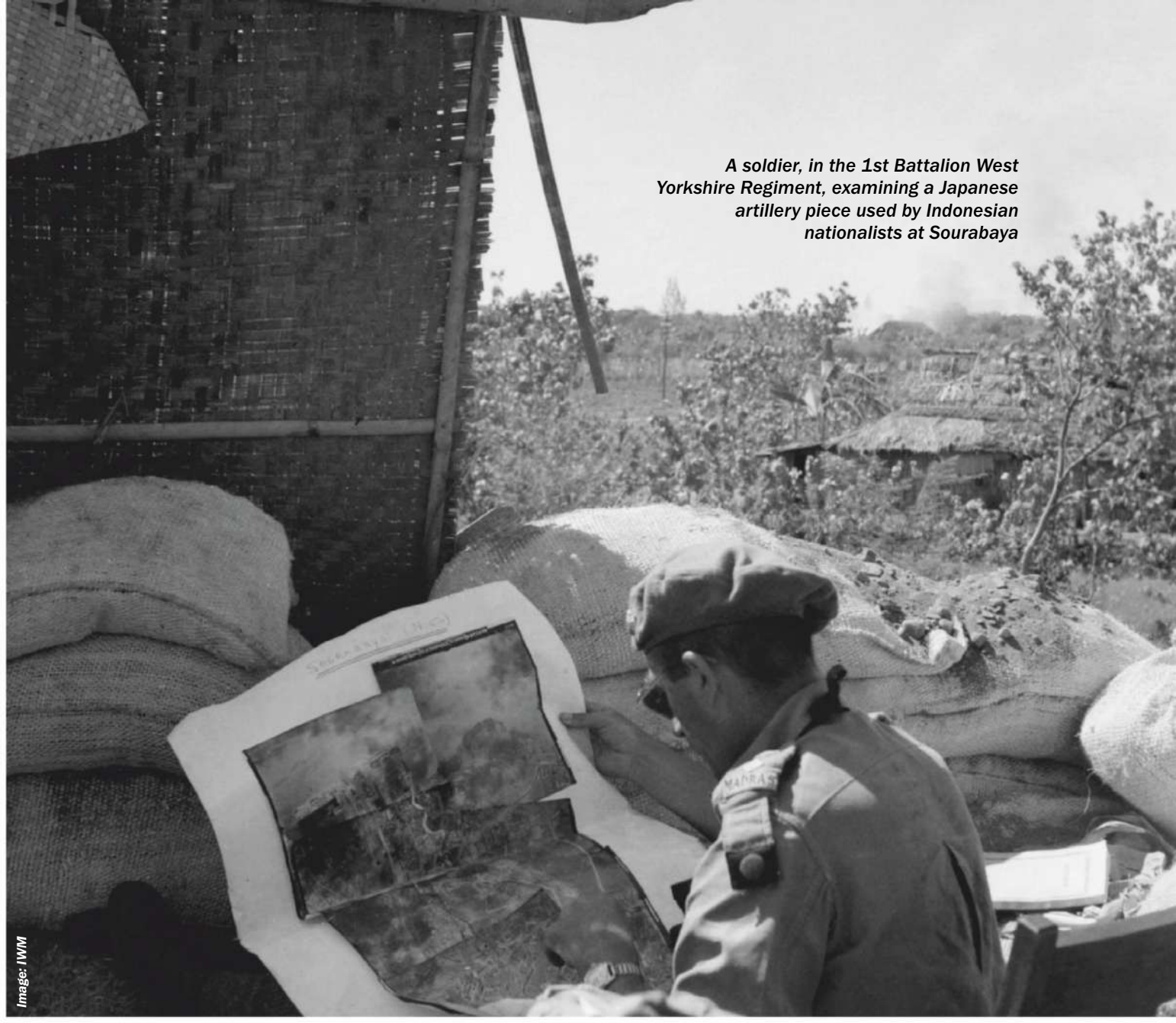


Image: IWM

A soldier, in the 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, examining a Japanese artillery piece used by Indonesian nationalists at Sourabaya

months before Dutch troops can be trained and sent out from Holland."

However the operations included some violent fighting, particularly at Sourabaya (Surabaya) on 28 October 1945 where 49th Indian Infantry Brigade (c. 4,000 largely Indian troops) faced about 20,000 Tentara Keamana Rakyat (Indonesian Republican Army – trained and equipped by the Japanese) and 100,000 armed civilians resulting in the capture, torture and killing of several British and Indian officers – 16 officers and 217 other ranks died, including the brigade commander Brigadier Mallaby. According to the of the Brigade's actions at Sourabya, "Brigadier Mallaby was murdered by a mob after being deserted by Indonesian officials when endeavouring to stop trouble, where a large mob were insisting that the English had surrendered and must lay down their arms. He realised the risk he was taking and acted in an endeavour to save the company of infantry in this area, but without the support of a least a section of the mob, his task was impossible."

The 5th Indian Division, commanded by Major General Robert Mansergh, was drafted in to quell the situation: an assignment he achieved by the end of November. Even with the impending independence of India and Pakistan, the Indian Army was still considered by the British government and Mountbatten as the strategic reserve in South East Asia. Only four of the thirty battalions were British.

Auchinleck suggested that 2nd British Division be sent to the NEI but was overridden by Mountbatten with 5th Indian Division backing up 23rd and 26th Indian Divisions. In fact, when Christison had to get his plan approved for the clearing up of Batavia, he commented in his memoir, "Mountbatten and Alanbrooke [Chief of Imperial General Staff] then approved the plan and Mountbatten said to see Indian troops were used; he did not want British troops widowed at this time so long after the war. This angered Bill [Lieutenant Colonel Bill Ridley] who bravely said 'Sir, do you really think it is different if Mrs Poop Singh is made a widow?' 'Tell your commander his plan is approved' said Alanbrooke."

Indian Army troops were also deployed as a brigade of the occupation forces in Japan, in Burma (Myanmar), Hong Kong, Siam (Thailand), Borneo and Malaya (Malaysia). The army continued to adapt to their new roles. For instance in Malaya, Indian troops became more like administrators. Although the corruption and behaviour of British and Indian troops in Malaya and Singapore undermined public confidence even further in 1945 and at least as much as 1942.

In his appraisal of the situation in November 1945, General Auchinleck stated that the Indian Armed Forces were currently capable of dealing with communal and anti-Government disturbances but this situation would not necessarily last until the following year due to demobilisation, the Indian National Army trials, the nationalism of most Indian officers and the Congress campaign against Indian soldiers propping up European empires in French Indo-China and the NEI. He concluded, "Our action in Java and French Indo-China is already being represented as European repression of national risings of Eastern peoples. If this is made a major political issue as is likely, it may have a serious effect upon the loyalty of the Indian Armed Forces. It is certainly very undesirable that any further Indian troops should be sent to these or other similar countries."

Indian troops remained in Saigon, Java and Sumatra until 1946. They had to deal with many issues ranging from repatriating prisoners of war and civilian internees, disarming Japanese soldiers and counterinsurgency operations against nationalist guerrillas. By the withdrawal of the Indian divisions from NEI at the end of November 1946, over 600 men and officers had been killed on Java and Sumatra. Between June and November 1946, 180,000 British and Indian troops returned to India including: HQ 15 Indian Corps, 26th Indian Division, 50th Indian Tank Brigade, 80th Indian Infantry Brigade (all from NEI), 7th Indian Division from Malaya, and 32nd Indian Infantry Bridge from Borneo. In addition 23rd Indian Division was moved from NEI to Malaya and 17th Indian Division remained in Burma.

This demonstrates that not only the end of the Second World War is contested, particularly in Asia, but that British and Indian troops were still involved in conflict zones after Victory over Japan Day on 15 August 1945.

FURTHER READING

- ***'INTERNAL SITUATION IN INDIA, APPRECIATION BY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'***, 24 NOVEMBER 1945, LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY, INDIA OFFICE RECORD, L/WS/1/1008
- ***'LIFE AND TIMES OF GENERAL SIR PHILIP CHRISTISON'***, PRIVATE PAPERS OF GENERAL SIR PHILIP CHRISTISON, IWM, DOCUMENTS.4370
- ***'REPORT OF OPERATIONS OF 49TH INDIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE 25 OCTOBER – 8 NOVEMBER 1946'***, PRIVATE PAPERS OF GENERAL SIR ROBERT MANSERGH, IWM, DOCUMENTS.6697

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NORWAY'S THUNDER SHIELD

A national hero in two countries, Peter Wessel Tordenskjold was a swashbuckling, Scandinavian seadog who was the scourge of Sweden in the Baltic Sea

WORDS **TOM GARNER**

During the romantic Age of Sail in the early 18th century, Peter Wessel Tordenskjold became the embodiment of naval heroism and derring-do. A daredevil combination of dashing warrior and gentleman adventurer, his exploits against Sweden turned him into the Scandinavian equivalent of Admiral Lord Nelson. His brief life story was a meteoric blaze of fire during the Great Northern War that consumed the regions around the Baltic Sea for over 20 years. However, like a curiously high number of young people who achieve rapid achievements, Tordenskjold became a self-destructive victim of his own success. An obscure figure in international history, he is nevertheless a national hero in both Norway and Denmark.

Ambition in a dual kingdom

The future 'Tordenskjold' was born as Peter Jansen Wessel in 1690 to a wealthy merchant family in Trondheim, Norway. He was the 14th of 18 children and as a youth he was reputedly uncontrollable and involved in many fights. Eventually, the teenage Wessel ran away to sea with hopes of becoming an officer in the Royal Dano-Norwegian Navy.

Denmark and Norway had been united since 1523 with Denmark being the dominant country. Consisting of the two countries as well as Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the German duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, Denmark-Norway was a formidable Scandinavian power. Much like the union between England and Scotland, Denmark-Norway was a legal state of 'Twin Realms' with a single Danish monarch and a concentration of institutions in the larger capital, which was Copenhagen. There were also some differences with both kingdoms having separate legal codes, currencies and governmental bodies.

Norway was the junior partner and although later Norwegian historians disparaged the connection with Denmark as the '400-year night', it was largely not perceived like that at the time. Norway actually prospered with a thriving economy and was one of the wealthiest countries in the world throughout the union. This filtered through the military system and it was common for Norwegian men to take up service in the Danish armed forces as it was seen as a lucrative career opportunity, particularly in the Royal Dano-Norwegian Navy.

Wessel was one of those ambitious Norwegians who wished to earn his fortune as a naval officer but he was initially rejected as a cadet. He instead spent three years serving on merchant ships that sailed to Guinea and the Caribbean. In 1710, he was finally accepted as a cadet and although he was only 20 years old he was already a highly experienced sailor. Over the next ten years he would experience rapid promotions thanks to his reckless courage and military skill.

In the spring of 1711, Wessel became a second lieutenant and served as second-in-command of the frigate Postillion from July of the same year. He soon became the protégé of the Norwegian admiral Waldemar Løvendal who promoted him to captain-lieutenant of a four-gun sloop called Ormen.

The Great Northern War

At this time Denmark-Norway was involved in the Great Northern War (1700-21), a huge conflict that was primarily fought between Russia and the Dano-Norwegians' great rival – Sweden. Under the rule of the formidable soldier-king Charles XII, Sweden was a great power and had a large European empire that was the envy of the regional Baltic countries. Russia, Saxony-Poland-Lithuania and Denmark-Norway formed an alliance to challenge the supremacy of the Swedes but Charles XII won a series of impressive military victories in the early stages of the conflict.

Denmark-Norway had been one of the first victims of Charles XII's success when he attacked the Danish mainland in 1700. Copenhagen was bombarded and Denmark-Norway was initially forced out of the war by the terms of the Peace of Travendal. However,

A contemporary portrait of Peter Wessel Tordenskjold by Dutch-Danish painter Jacob Coning (1647-1724) who was a popular portraitist at the Danish court

Opposite page: *The Royal Arms of Denmark-Norway above an 1897 photograph of Tordenskjold's pistol*

"HE WOULD EXPERIENCE RAPID PROMOTIONS THANKS TO HIS RECKLESS COURAGE AND MILITARY SKILL"

Source: Wiki / Oslo Museum

when Charles was decisively defeated by Tsar Peter the Great at the Battle of Poltava in 1709, Denmark-Norway re-entered the war in a new anti-Swedish alliance.

There were significant land campaigns in this phase of the war but naval confrontations between the Dano-Norwegians and the Swedes were also commonplace. Wessel eagerly participated in these engagements and started out by cruising along the Swedish coast in the Ormen on reconnaissance missions. Promoted to the command of an 18-gun frigate called Løvendals Galej in June 1712, he quickly gained a reputation for randomly attacking Swedish ships regardless of the odds and always evading capture.

These actions prompted the Swedes to put a price on his head, which only served to enhance his reputation. Far from pleasing the Dano-Norwegian admiralty, Wessel had actually only been given his command of Løvendals Galej by his mentor, Admiral Løvendal. This was against senior advice because other naval officers perceived that Wessel was an impulsive young man. He never considered the consequences of his actions and his arrogance often earned the wrath of his superiors.

For example, on 12 August 1713, Wessel wrote a mocking letter to the Swedish governor of Gothenburg. He accused them of letting their privateers attack merchant ships instead of fighting real warships and cheekily urged the governor to send a ship for him. This was because there was a reward on his head and he wanted to be collected for imprisonment in style. The governor did not share Wessel's sense of humour and complained to a senior general in Norway. He consequently received

"WESSEL WAS COURT-MARTIALLED FOR THIS GENTLEMANLY FIGHT ON THE ORDERS OF FREDERICK IV BUT HE WAS ACQUITTED AND THEN PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN"

a reprimand from King Frederick IV of Denmark-Norway but the confident seaman was not to be deterred.

A gentlemanly duel

The prime example of Wessel's romantic, buccaneering spirit occurred during 26-27 July 1714, when Løvendals Gallej fought a Swedish frigate called De Olbing Galley. This ship was disguised by an English flag and commanded by a mysterious Englishman with a Germanic name called Bactmann. Wessel himself was flying under a Dutch flag and when the two ships realised their true colours they opened fire and fought for over 14 hours. Wessel met a considerable match in Bactmann, although the Swedish ship attempted to escape after prolonged fighting. This only encouraged Wessel to raise more sails and pursue the frigate.

Eventually, after taking much damage, Wessel ran out of ammunition and messaged his situation to Bactmann. He thanked him for a fine duel and boldly requested the Englishman for more ammunition so that the fight could continue. Bactmann declined this outlandish request but the two ships came together. Both crews cheered and drank to each other's health before the captains agreed to sail away in opposite directions. Wessel was court-martialled for this gentlemanly fight on the orders of Frederick IV but he was acquitted and then promoted to captain.

Throughout 1715, Wessel remained the scourge of the Swedes, particularly off the coast of Swedish Pomerania (now the German-Polish Baltic coast). During a battle off Kolberg (Kołobrzeg) he captured the Swedish Rear-Admiral Hans Wachtmeister and a frigate called Vita Örn (White Eagle). This was granted as Wessel's flagship and it was renamed Hvide Ørn.

On 8 August 1715, he distinguished himself again at the Battle of Rügen under the command of Peter Raben. Twenty-five Dano-Norwegian ships fought 22 Swedish vessels in a clash that was tactically indecisive but a strategic success for Raben's fleet. Wessel was personally able to chase away enemy ships in Hvide Ørn by sheer courage and skill. He was now a valued asset for the high command and was knighted by Frederick IV on 24 February 1716. The king permitted him to adopt the name of 'Tordenskjold', which literally translates as 'Thunder Shield'. The former Peter Wessel was only 25 years old.

Dynekilen

While Tordenskjold was wreaking his unique brand of naval havoc, the war continued to go badly for Sweden. The Battle of Poltava had begun a downward trend in Charles XII's fortunes that, with a few exceptions, proved to be irreversible. Russia's military confidence was increasing and while Tordenskjold was

Wessel's crew toast the health of their duelling partners after the clash of the Løvendals Gallej and De Olbing Galley, 27 July 1714

Tordenskjold painted at the pinnacle of his career as a vice-admiral

Images: Wiki / PD Art

THE COMMON FLEET

The Royal Dano-Norwegian Navy had Medieval origins and achieved spectacular victories as well as notable defeats

With large coastlines, Denmark-Norway long had an intimate relationship with the sea. Vikings from both countries were renowned sailors but it wasn't until the 14th century that records of a unified navy in Western Scandinavia began to appear. Queen Margaret I of Denmark (r. 1387-1412) ordered the building of a navy to be maintained for the Danish monarchy. However, a full naval force was not officially enshrined in law until 1510, under King Hans I. This still predated the establishment of the Royal Navy of England, which occurred in 1542. By this time, Denmark was unified with Norway and so the navy was known as the Royal Dano-Norwegian Navy or the 'Common Fleet'.

In the beginning, the navy's role was to counter the power of the Hanseatic League and secure control of the Baltic Sea with Sweden becoming its main rival. The fleet was considered to be the Danish monarch's personal property and the 'King's Waters' were extensive. The navy's reach included seas off Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands as well Arctic waters off the North Cape and Spitsbergen.

Before the Great Northern War, the fleet had success during the Scanian War (1675-79) where it won a decisive battle against the Swedes in 1677 at Køge Bay. In Tordenskjold's day, there were 19,000 enrolled personnel – the majority of whom were Norwegian. In the later 18th century there were victories against the Barbary States in the Mediterranean Sea that stopped attacks against Scandinavian merchant shipping. However, the Dano-Norwegians twice suffered defeat at the hands of the British Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars.

Two battles were lost at Copenhagen in 1801 and 1807. The first was one of Lord Nelson's famous victories while the second forced the surrender of the entire fleet. Denmark and Norway separated only seven years later in 1814 with the Common Fleet being split into what is now the Royal Danish and Royal Norwegian navies.

***Above:** The 1807 bombardment of Copenhagen resulted in 3,000 Dano-Norwegian casualties compared to just 42 British sailors killed*

The Battle of Køge Bay is regarded as the greatest victory in Danish naval history because it gave Denmark-Norway control of the Baltic Sea

Tordenskjold cheekily enquired why the Swedish commandant of Marstrand had not surrendered in 1719 with the words, "What is taking you so long?"

On 1 December 1717, Tordenskjold's four-gun vessel was pursued by a much larger Swedish ship. Tordenskjold shot the Swedish captain after he was asked to surrender and managed to escape in the ensuing confusion

fighting ship-to-ship duels, the Imperial Russian Navy won its first decisive victory against the Swedes at Gangut.

During this time, Charles XII had been in enforced exile in the Ottoman Empire. By the time he returned to Sweden he found himself fighting a reduced, defensive war for the first time. His primary foe was now Denmark-Norway and he decided to split the union by invading Norwegian territory. By attacking Norway, Charles aimed to cut Denmark's supply lines and force the Danes to withdraw from Sweden's southernmost province of Scania.

The invasion began in 1716 with the Norwegian capital Christiania (Oslo) being occupied. By May 1716, Charles was besieging the fortress of Fredriksten in the city of Halden, with Swedish troops being transported to Norway by sea. Tordenskjold was ordered to sail from Copenhagen to stop the Swedish shipping and on 7 July 1716 he learned that a Swedish troop escort fleet had anchored at Dynekilen. This was a narrow fjord north of Strönstad in the Västra Götaland region of western Sweden near the Norwegian border.

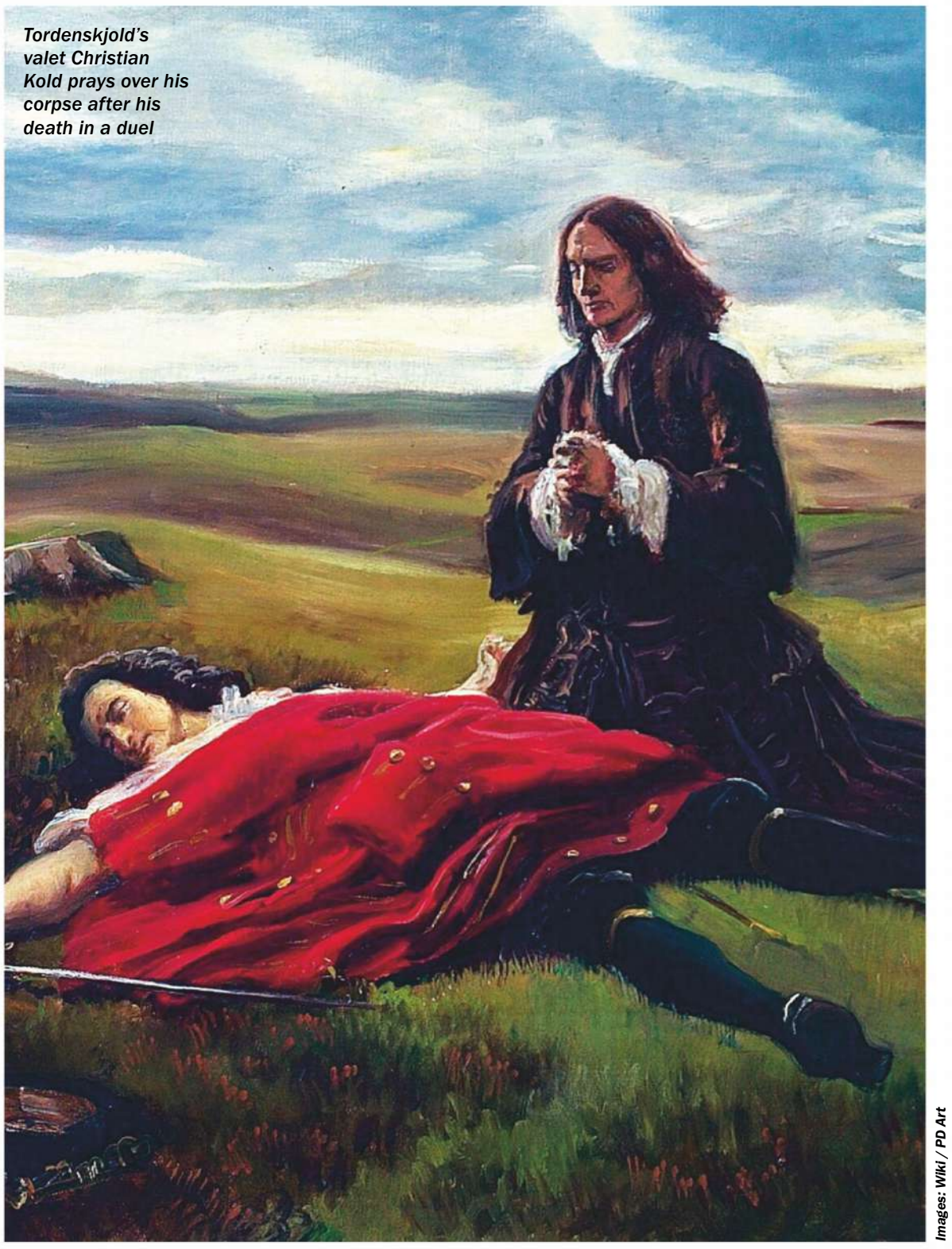
Tordenskjold commanded a small fleet of seven warships containing 931 men. These were outnumbered by the Swedes who had 13 warships and 1,284 men as well as a land battery and 14 additional merchant vessels. The Swedish ships were arranged defensively and the battery of six 12-pounder guns was placed on an island in the fjord. Soldiers were also placed on both sides of Dynekilen harbour to provide crossfire. Tordenskjold was undeterred by these defences and on 8 July 1716 he sailed his ships into the fjord in a surprise attack that began at 4.00am.

The Dano-Norwegian ships were quickly anchored and opened fire on the Swedes. The ensuing battle lasted all morning and into the afternoon of 8 July. At 1.00pm, Tordenskjold's men captured the battery and the largest Swedish ship, Stenbock, surrendered. The Dano-Norwegians had effectively won the battle but the Swedes were determined to scuttle their fleet. By the late afternoon the majority of the Swedish fleet was sinking, burning or being deliberately run aground. Tordenskjold, who was never one to miss lucrative prizes, became determined to capture as many Swedish vessels as possible.

The stricken enemy ships were ordered to be made seaworthy and the Dano-Norwegians made great efforts put out the fires on board the Swedish ships and free the ones that had run aground. This was done despite the dangers of the various infernos and musket volleys from the Swedish soldiers on the shore. By 9.00pm, Tordenskjold left Dynekilen with over two dozen captured ships and his own fleet intact.

Image: Wiki / Hesekiel

Tordenskjold's sarcophagus in Holmen Church, Copenhagen



Tordenskjold's valet Christian Kold prays over his corpse after his death in a duel

Images: Wiki / PD Art

This impressive victory forced Charles XII to end his invasion of Norway and he returned to Sweden. Tordenskjold was promoted to post-captain and given the command of the Kattegat Squadron while his subordinates were each awarded a gold medal.

A sudden demise

After Dynekilen, Tordenskjold's career continued to flourish. On 19 December 1718, he heard rumours that Charles XII had been killed at the resumed Siege of Fredriksten. When the rumour was confirmed he immediately travelled to Copenhagen where he conveyed the news to Frederick IV. The king was so pleased that he promoted Tordenskjold (who was still only in his late 20s) to rear-admiral on the spot.

In 1719, Rear-Admiral Tordenskjold directed a devastating attack against the Swedish Gothenburg fleet that lay at Marstrand. The coastal city had a stone fortress called Carlsten, which Tordenskjold tricked the Swedes into surrendering. He claimed there was a huge Dano-Norwegian force in Marstrand but this was an elaborate bluff. The admiral actually passed the same troops in and out of the town square to make it look as though there were more soldiers than there actually were. Some historians have claimed this incident is a myth but Tordenskjold was again promoted to vice-admiral shortly afterwards.

"THE VETERAN SWASHBUCKLER REFUSED TO BACK OUT OF THE FIGHT AND WAS STABBED THROUGH THE CHEST BY VON HOLSTEIN"

Denmark-Norway eventually concluded peace with Sweden on favourable terms in July 1720 at the Treaty of Frederiksborg but Tordenskjold's fighting spirit struggled to adapt in the absence of war. He travelled to Germany and became embroiled in a gambling scandal within months. While he was staying in Hanover, he heard that several men had cheated one of his friends during a card game at a party. During the telling of this rumour, one of the accused men – Colonel Axel Jacob Staël von Holstein – introduced himself. He denied any wrongdoing and demanded an apology.

The hot-headed Tordenskjold defended his friend and a brawl broke out that ended with von Holstein challenging the admiral to a duel. On 12 November 1720, Tordenskjold and von Holstein faced each other at Gleidingen in Lower Saxony. It was an uneven match because von Holstein was armed with a military rapier while Tordenskjold only had his ceremonial dress sword. Despite this, the veteran swashbuckler refused to back out of the fight and was stabbed through the chest by von Holstein. Tordenskjold died in the arms of his servant aged only 30 and his corpse was brought to Copenhagen. He was buried without ceremony in the Holmen Church because duelling was illegal under Danish law.

Despite his unnecessary death and ignominious burial, Tordenskjold has since become a national hero in both Denmark and Norway. After Charles XII, he is regarded as the most heroic Scandinavian figure of the Great Northern War. The Danish and Norwegian navies have named several ships after him along with street names and five statues. He is mentioned by name in the Norwegian national anthem and the Danish royal anthem and has also been the subject of two films and a musical. For a man who embodied an exclusively Nordic brand of swashbuckling heroism, this adulation seems to be well founded.

Operator's Handbook

CURTISS P-40 WARHAWK

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The steel airframe made the aircraft heavy and rugged. Such construction made the P-40 capable of absorbing tremendous amounts of enemy fire and bringing its pilot home safely. Ground crewmen patched damaged aircraft and got them back into their air as rapidly as possible.

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COCKPIT

The armoured cockpit absorbed punishment and contributed to pilot survivability. In contrast, Japanese aircraft were lightly armoured and quite susceptible to explosions in midair.

Developed by Curtiss-Wright Corporation in the 1930s, the P-40 'Warhawk' found itself suddenly thrust on to the front line once the USA entered the Second World War in 1941. The P-40 was the successor to the obsolete P-36 'Hawk', which experienced many of the drawbacks that would hamper the Warhawk's performance in wartime. Despite lagging behind in terms of combat optimisation, among which was an engine ill-suited to higher altitudes and limited armament, P-40s nonetheless bolstered the Allies' desperate need for fighter planes during the dark early days of the war. The Tomahawk and Kittyhawk (illustration left) iterations, reconfigured for British and Commonwealth service, were found to be highly effective in the North African theatre.

However the P-40's most famous incarnation was undoubtedly with the American Volunteer Group (AVG) nicknamed the 'Flying Tigers'. These airmen, with their colourfully decorated aircraft, fought alongside forces of Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist China, during the Second Sino-Japanese War. By the end of the war, close to 14,000 P-40s had been built.

"THE P-40 'WARHAWK' FOUND ITSELF SUDDENLY THRUST ON TO THE FRONT LINE ONCE THE USA ENTERED THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN 1941"

ARMAMENT

50-calibre Browning M2 machine-guns provided heavy firepower. Some variants of the P-40 also mounted .30-calibre machine-guns; however, the heavier Browning M2 was more effective against enemy targets.

Illustration: Alex Pang

BOEING AH-64D APACHE LONGBOW

COMMISSIONED:	1939
ORIGIN:	USA
MAX SPEED:	608KM/H (378MPH)
ENGINE:	ALLISON V-1710 12-CYLINDER
CREW:	1
PRIMARY WEAPON:	SIX .50-Z (12.7MM) BROWNING M2

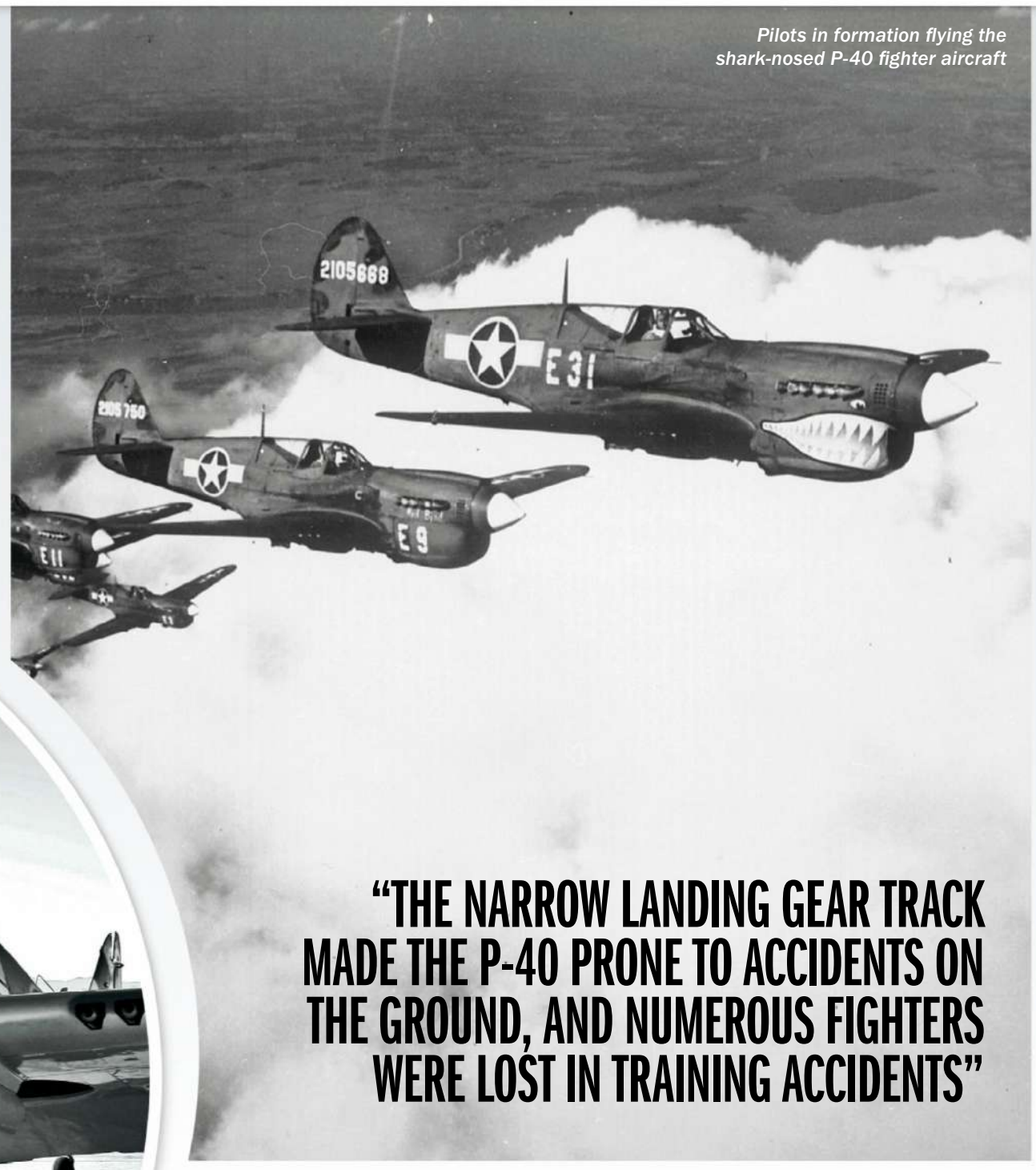
A first production Curtiss P-40

Source: Wiki / PD Gov

DESIGN

Early versions of the P-40 were poorly prepared for combat, without adequate armour plating or self-sealing fuel tanks, which had quickly become the standard in the European theatre. These early-war iterations also performed poorly at higher altitudes, relegating them mostly to reconnaissance roles in North Africa and Europe. Later variants, including the Tomahawk and Kittyhawk, largely solved these shortcomings. Nonetheless the narrow landing gear track made the P-40 prone to accidents on the ground, and numerous fighters were lost in training accidents, with novice pilots at the controls.

Source: Wiki / Rennett Stowe



Pilots in formation flying the shark-nosed P-40 fighter aircraft

"THE NARROW LANDING GEAR TRACK MADE THE P-40 PRONE TO ACCIDENTS ON THE GROUND, AND NUMEROUS FIGHTERS WERE LOST IN TRAINING ACCIDENTS"

Source: Wiki / PD Gov

Royal Australian Air Force mechanics carrying ammunition belts for Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk fighters at an Australian airfield, circa 1943

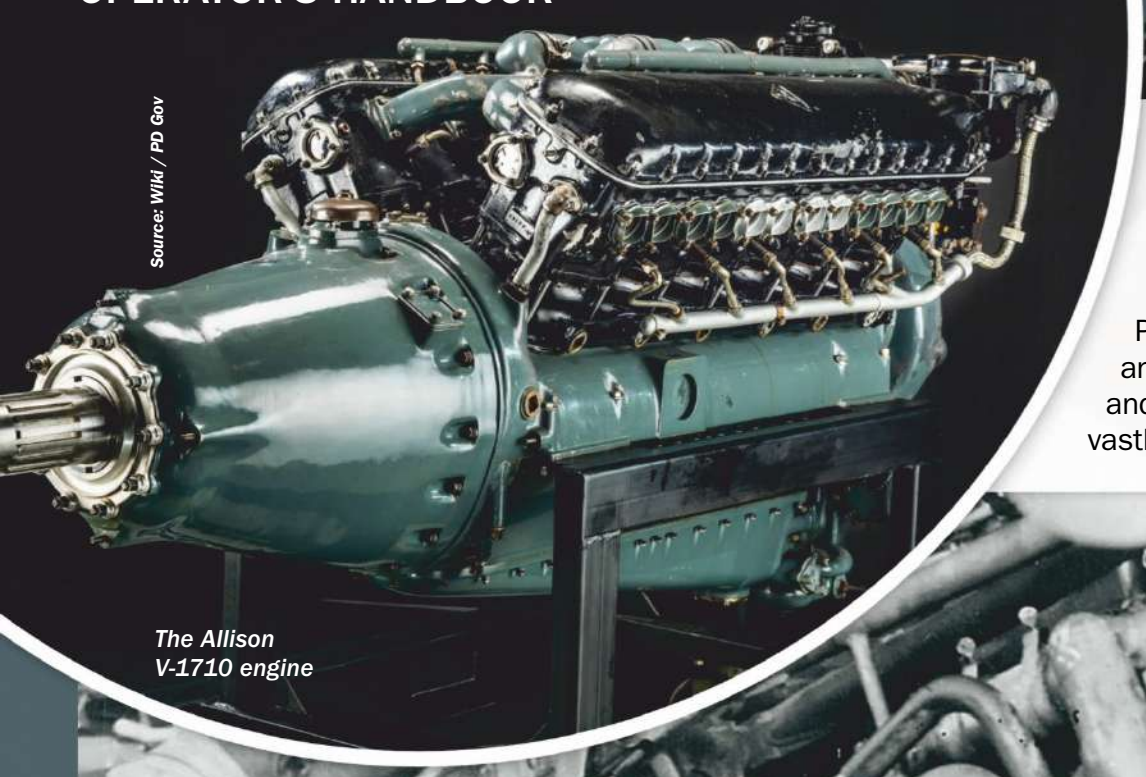
© Getty

ARMAMENT

Though very early prototypes of the P-40 were fitted with only two machine-guns in its upper cowling, eventually more were added to increase the firepower of the aircraft. The British Tomahawks also fitted .30-calibre guns, and eventually a hardpoint was added to the underside of the airframe to carry a bomb load or an additional fuel tank, allowing for greater versatility in a fighter-bomber or long-distance reconnaissance role. Later iterations of the P-40 carried up to six machine-guns, mounted into the upper cowling and on the wings.

US Army Air Force Curtiss P-40E Warhawk at the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio

Source: Wiki / PD Gov



Source: Wiki / PD Gov

The Allison V-1710 engine

ENGINE

The Allison V-1710 was the USA's primary aero engine, and the first American-built liquid-cooled system capable of achieving over 1,000 horsepower. It was used in most US Army aircraft, including the Lockheed P-38, Bell P-39 and P-63, and earlier P-51 Mustangs. However in the P-40 the Allison underperformed at higher altitudes, and was put through numerous upgrades before the end of WWII. In 1941 the British and Canadian-operated 'Kittyhawk' P-40 was fitted with a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, vastly improving the aircraft's performance.

Mechanics George Johnson and James C. Howard work on a Curtiss P-40

Source: Wiki / PD Gov

COCKPIT

Visibility for the pilot was adequate although restricted by the complex windscreen frame. Ground visibility was especially poor, which contributed to accidents along with the narrow landing gear. Later a bubble canopy was fitted to increase visibility. Earlier iterations also did not feature bullet-proof glass in the cockpit, something that was quickly rectified as a result of combat experience. A fire extinguisher was kept under the seat and a first aid kit was attached to the right-hand side of the cockpit – both could mean the difference between life and death.

"EARLIER ITERATIONS ALSO DID NOT FEATURE BULLET-PROOF GLASS IN THE COCKPIT, SOMETHING THAT WAS QUICKLY RECTIFIED"

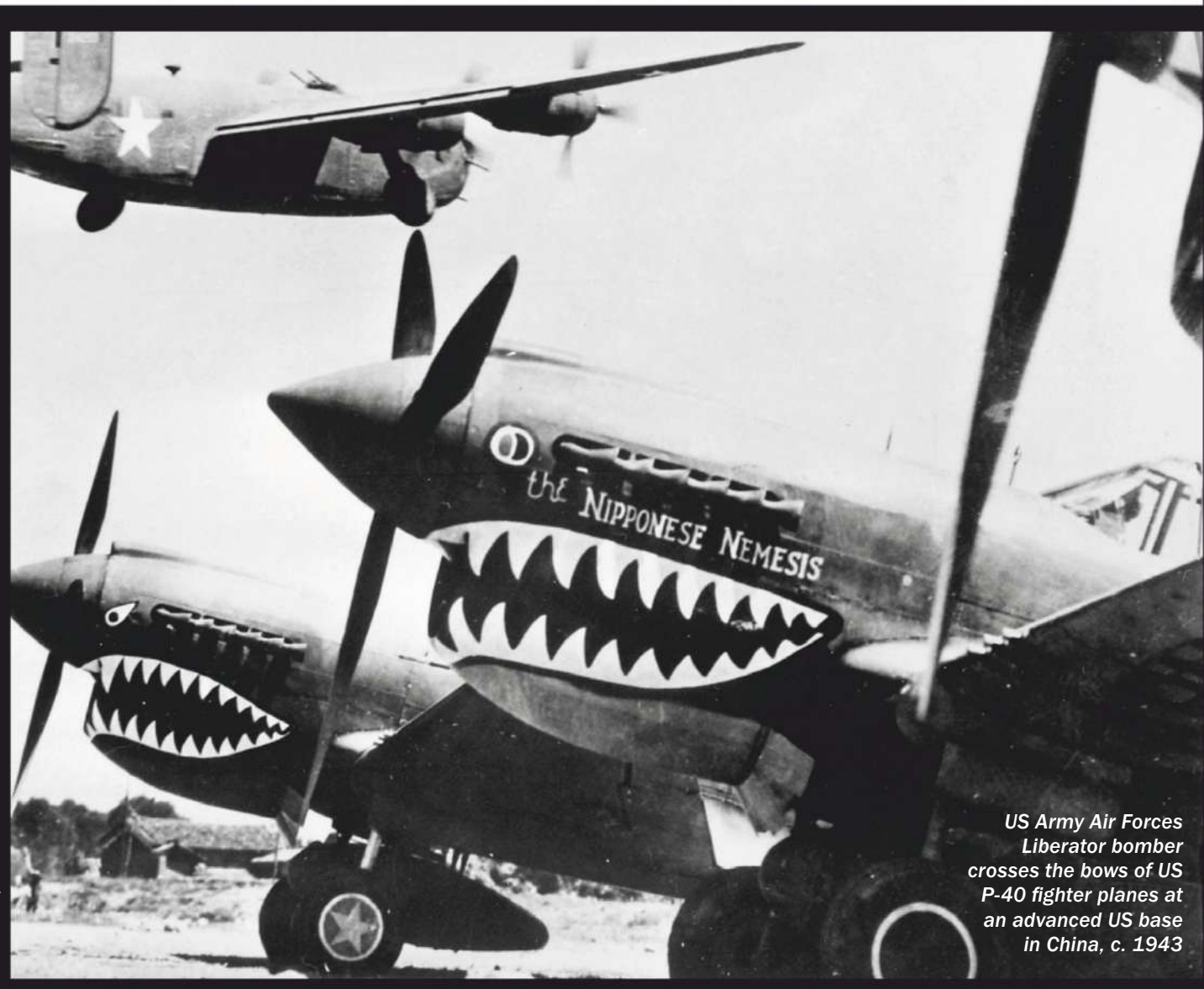
© Alamy

Hell's Angels, the 3rd Squadron of the 1st American Volunteer Group 'Flying Tigers'

Source: Wiki / PD Gov

SERVICE HISTORY

The Curtiss P-40 saw action in nearly every theatre of the Second World War, serving within American, British, Commonwealth and Soviet air forces. In 1940, 140 P-40s bound for France were redirected to Britain after the capitulation of the French government. Though the RAF found the P-40s were currently inadequate for defending against the Luftwaffe attacks during the Battle of Britain, they were put to work in reconnaissance roles and in 1941 used by the Desert Air Force (DAF). The P-40's most iconic role by far was as part of the 'Flying Tigers', the squadrons of the American Volunteer Group (AVG) fighting against the Japanese in China. The distinctive shark's mouth and menacing eye painted the nose cowls of the aircraft – first adopted by the DAF – soon became famous around the world and a morale-boosting symbol of the American fightback after Pearl Harbor. By the end of the war the P-40 still remained second, or third, choice behind its far speedier and more-effective contemporaries such as the P-51 Mustang and P-38 Thunderbolt.



Source: Wiki / PD Gov

US Army Air Forces Liberator bomber crosses the bows of US P-40 fighter planes at an advanced US base in China, c. 1943

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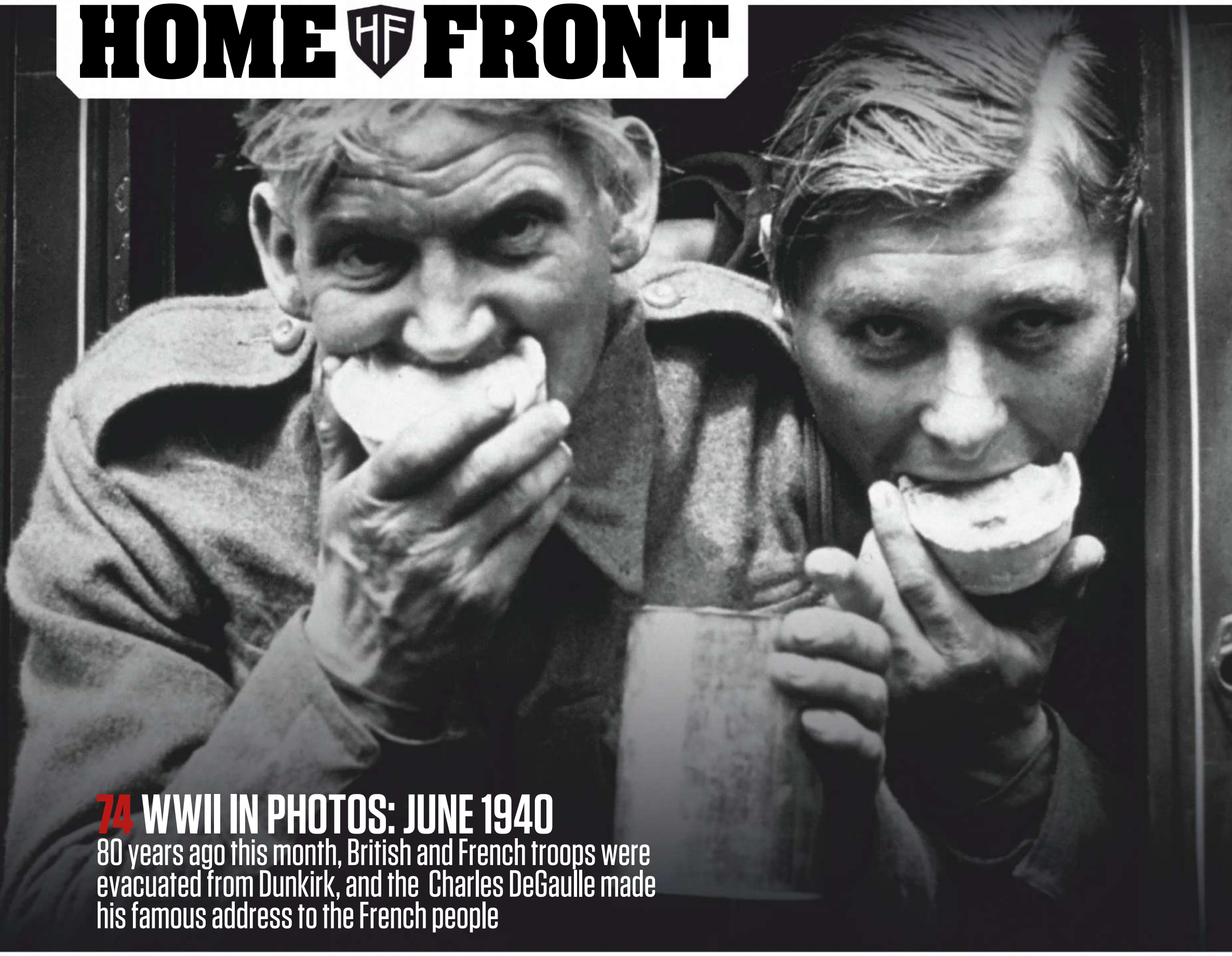

74 WWII IN PHOTOS: JUNE 1940

80 years ago this month, British and French troops were evacuated from Dunkirk, and the Charles DeGaulle made his famous address to the French people

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Visit the world-class exhibitions from the comfort of home

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The latest films and books on your screens and shelves

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Q&A with author and historian Jeffrey Cox

MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Discover Rembrandt's astonishing genius up close, Wargaming's new tank podcast and the location of a lost landing craft off the coast of Wales

Rembrandt called his painting, Officers And Men Of The Amsterdam Kloveniers Militia, The Company Of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq. *It wasn't called* The Night Watch *until 1897*

Source: Wiki / PD Art / Tastenlöwe

THE 'NIGHT WATCH' IN DETAIL

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam has produced an in-depth online digital photograph of Rembrandt's masterpiece, featuring Dutch musketeers

Perhaps the most recognisable painting of the Dutch 'Golden Age' of art, *De Nachtwacht* (*The Night Watch*) was completed by Rembrandt van Rijn in 1642. It is best known for its colossal size, (363cm x 437cm), the dramatic use of light and shadow and the perception of motion in what would have traditionally been a static group portrait. It is also a fascinating insight into what would have otherwise been a forgotten military unit.

The painting was commissioned in 1639 by Captain Frans Banninck Cocq (the central figure dressed in black with a red sash) to depict him and over a dozen members of his Kloveniers (musketeers) of Amsterdam's civic guard. The Kloveniers were voluntary citizen militiamen in the Early Modern Netherlands and Cocq's men were paid to be included in the painting. In the scene, Cocq takes centre stage with his deputy, Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch, while their gathered Kloveniers carry an assortment of weapons with which to defend their neighbourhood.

The painting now hangs in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and is its most famous exhibit. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the museum has had to temporarily close but it has uploaded a remarkable digital version that is the largest and most detailed photograph of the painting ever produced. Created as part of the museum's 'Operation Night Watch' restoration project, it is now possible to zoom in on individual brushstrokes and even particles of pigment in the painting. This is all possible to see because the photograph is actually a composite of 528 digital photographs that have been assembled together. This means that previously almost hidden details can now be seen by the naked eye and it is an extraordinary testament to Rembrandt's artistic skill.

A glass box surrounds the painting for the acquisition of high-resolution analysis and photography for 'Operation Night Watch', 13 October 2019

For example, Cocq is revealed to have a glint in his eye that isn't just the result of one dab of Rembrandt's brush. It in fact consists of four separate dabs that each uses a slightly different shade of paint. The almost infinite amount of detail is extraordinary from the individually recreated textures of beards to the shadowy dog that is revealed to wear a fashionable collar and gold pendant. The chaos of the scene is even revealed to show a musket being fired and subtly smoking behind van Ruytenburch's head. It is also possible to see corrections that Rembrandt made such as the index finger of the ensign who holds the Kloveniers flag.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OPERATION NIGHT WATCH VISIT: WWW.RIJKSMUSEUM.NL/NIGHTWATCH

LOCATING A FORGOTTEN LANDING CRAFT

A WWII amphibious assault craft has been discovered off a Welsh island 77 years after it disappeared on active duty

LCT 326 was a Mk III 'Landing Craft Tank' that was designed to land armoured vehicles during amphibious operations. Launched in April 1942, the vessel disappeared while transiting from Scotland to Devon in February 1943. Fourteen crew members were lost and the Admiralty listed the cause of loss as bad weather or a collision with a mine.

A collaboration of teams of marine experts from Bangor and Bournemouth Universities has now found LCT 326. Using sonar from Bangor University's survey vessel, the wreck was discovered off Bardsey Island, Wales. Its final resting place is located at a position 25 miles south from when it was last seen and it is in two halves that lie 130 metres apart on the seabed.

The cause of the vessel's loss remains unknown although it could have foundered in heavy seas. The location of this naval grave will now be reported to the Admiralty so that records can be corrected and the resting place of the crew be accurately recorded.

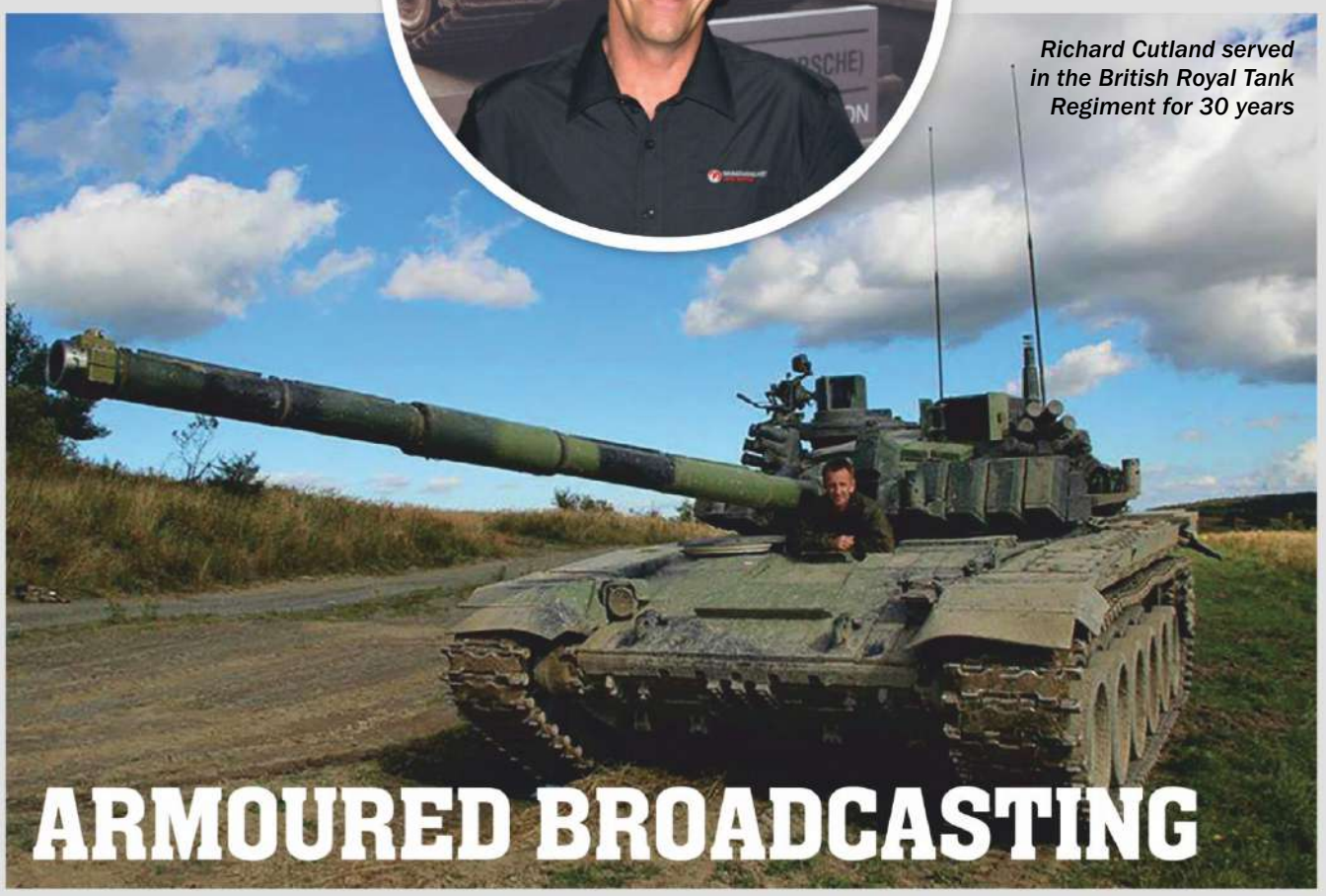
LCT 326 was discovered by Prince Madog, the commissioned research vessel of Bangor University

Image: Bangor and Bournemouth Universities

A Crusader I tank emerges from an LCT, 26 April 1942

Source: Wiki / PD

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
WWW.BANGOR.AC.UK OR WWW.BOURNEMOUTH.AC.UK



Richard Cutland served in the British Royal Tank Regiment for 30 years

ARMOURED BROADCASTING

Wargaming has launched a new podcast for tank aficionados featuring first-rate interviews and a special offer for World Of Tanks

Wargaming is one of the biggest military video game companies in the world with its free-to-play online action games such as *World Of Tanks*. It is also active in preserving military history heritage worldwide with projects that include fund-raising for vehicle restorations and now a new podcast. *Tank Nuts* is Wargaming's first tank-related podcast and is hosted by British Army veteran Richard Cutland, Head of Military Relations Europe for *World Of Tanks*.

Designed to celebrate tanks and the individuals that work with them, *Tank Nuts* gives audiences an insightful, multifaceted programme that educates, inspires and amuses. Experts delve into the top brass of the armoured world from historians, stunt-people, veterans, celebrities and more. The first episodes are already live and include interviews with Lieutenant Colonel Jim Howard of the Royal Tank Regiment and Craig Moore, the acclaimed author of *Tank Hunter*. There is also an interview with stunt coordinator and performer Jim Dowdall who has worked on films such as *Where Eagles Dare*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Fury* and nine *James Bond* movies. Upcoming interviews include the director of The Tank Museum and the first female tank commander in British Army history.

Audiences can subscribe to *Tank Nuts* on their favourite podcast platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcast, Google Podcast and many more. Tank fans can also watch the video podcasts on *World Of Tanks* YouTube channel. For those who want to integrate or link to the podcast directly, you can implement the following widget: www.anchor.fm/world-of-tanks

The podcast is also providing a special offer for new *World Of Tanks* players. Upon registration, users can use the invite code 'TANKNUTS' to access special content across all global regions except Russia. This includes gameplay with WWII tanks like the Matilda Black Prince, T-34-85M and T-127. Players also receive one 'garage' slot and seven free days' use of a *World Of Tanks* Premium account. The code value for this offer is 24 US dollars so it is a great gift for first time users.

TO REGISTER VISIT:
WWW.WORLDOFTANKS.EU

One of Tank Nuts' *interviewees is Richard Smith OBE, Director of the Tank Museum*

Tank Nuts' World of Tanks *invite code offer includes British and Soviet armoured vehicles from WWII*

Images: Wargaming

WWII THIS MONTH...

JUNE 1940

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place each month of the conflict

"WELCOME HOME!"

Two British soldiers tuck in to food and drink provided after their evacuation from Dunkirk, during Operation Dynamo. After the thousands of tired and hungry troops arrived at the channel ports, they were welcomed by civilian volunteers, as well as members of the Royal Army Supply Corps, who provided hot drinks and food. Feeding and transporting the returning soldiers was a huge, logistical operation, with volunteers working day and night, handing out sandwiches, cheese, fruit, pies and other much-needed, and welcome, refreshments.

"ICI LONDRES!"

On 18 June Charles de Gaulle gave his famous speech, appealing to the French people to continue the fight against the Germans. Though there is evidence to suggest that de Gaulle's speech was not heard by a large number of his countrymen, his words nonetheless became a powerful symbol of the early resistance to the occupation, and an opposing to the Vichy regime under Philippe Pétain. From his base in London, De Gaulle continued to broadcast his speeches to France and the UK through the BBC. Radio Londres (Radio London), a nightly Free French radio programme was broadcast by the BBC throughout the years of the occupation, with broadcasts beginning with the words "Ici Londres. Les Français parlent aux Français" ("This is London. The French talk to the French"). These broadcasts would also later be used to communicate coded messages to resistance members in France.

FALL OF PARIS

Hitler and his entourage photographed during the Fuhrer's visit to Paris, the day after the signing of the armistice between France and Germany at Compiègne.

ITALY STRIKES

Eager to not be left out of the victory over France, on 10 June Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, opening another front in the south of the country, and across the Mediterranean, although the Italian armed forces were ill-prepared for a major offensive. However, by the time Mussolini entered the war, Paris had already fallen and France was on the brink of total capitulation.

All images © Getty

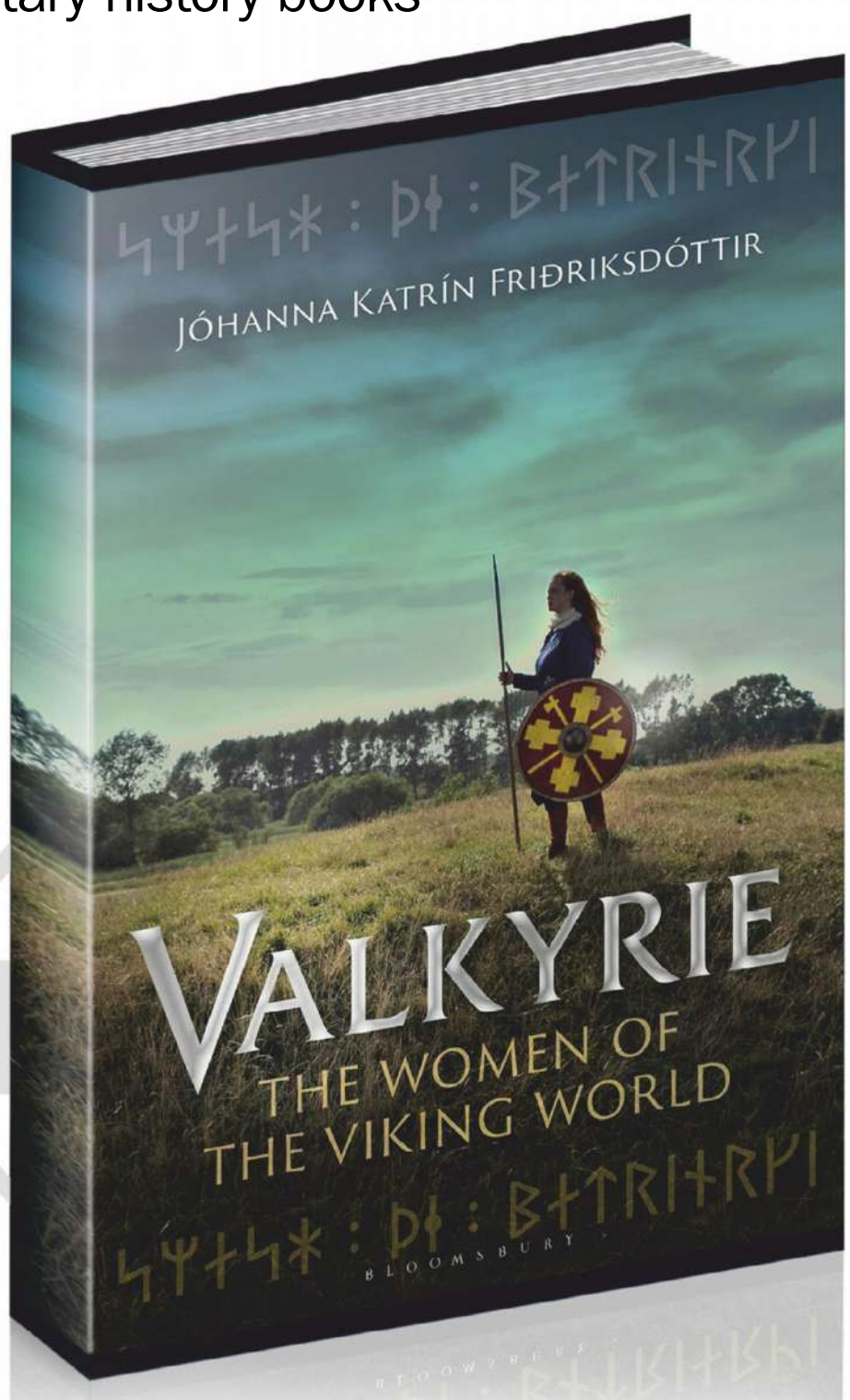
REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books

VALKYRIE
THE WOMEN OF THE VIKING WORLD

BRINGING NORSE WOMEN TO THE FOREFRONT OF THE VIKING WORLD

Author: Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir
Publisher: Bloomsbury **Price:** £20
Released: Out now



This deep dive into the lives of the women of the Viking era is a fascinating one, combining as it does both the realities and mythology of the time to reveal the complexity and sophistication of the culture. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's investigation merges these two worlds brilliantly, helping to elevate the everyday while also grounding the fantastic to give each the meaning they deserve.

Friðriksdóttir starts with the myths of the Valkyrie and the interesting way in which they were used and depicted depending on the author of the tale. The role of female figures as arbiters of life and death, standing both alongside and yet separate from the gods is intriguing. As we learn through the book, it speaks to the important role women played as the backbone of Norse culture, keeping the villages and farms running while men (for the most part, but not exclusively) travelled abroad. And yet the Valkyrie are the very definition of liberty and freedom away from male control and the curtailing of that freedom is a recurring theme in the mythology, again speaking to the societal norms that the authors desired to be enforced.

The book goes on to investigate the lives of women through each stage of their lives from childhood and adolescence through to motherhood, widowhood and old age. The standing of these women evolves in fascinating ways, going from virtually no self-determination as a child and young woman (often being forced into arranged marriages by their parents) into gradually increasing degrees of control as they established their own households.

Friðriksdóttir often refers back to the core texts, the sagas that inform so much of our understanding of the Viking world. From these she finds fascinating and sometimes even quite shocking examples of women, from powerless maidens to all powerful matriarchs, and contrasts them brilliantly with modern sentiments, helping to contextualise the thoroughly un-romantic world of the Vikings.

"JÓHANNA KATRÍN FRIÐRIKSDÓTTIR'S INVESTIGATION MERGES THESE TWO WORLDS BRILLIANTLY, HELPING TO ELEVATE THE EVERYDAY WHILE ALSO GROUNDING THE FANTASTIC"

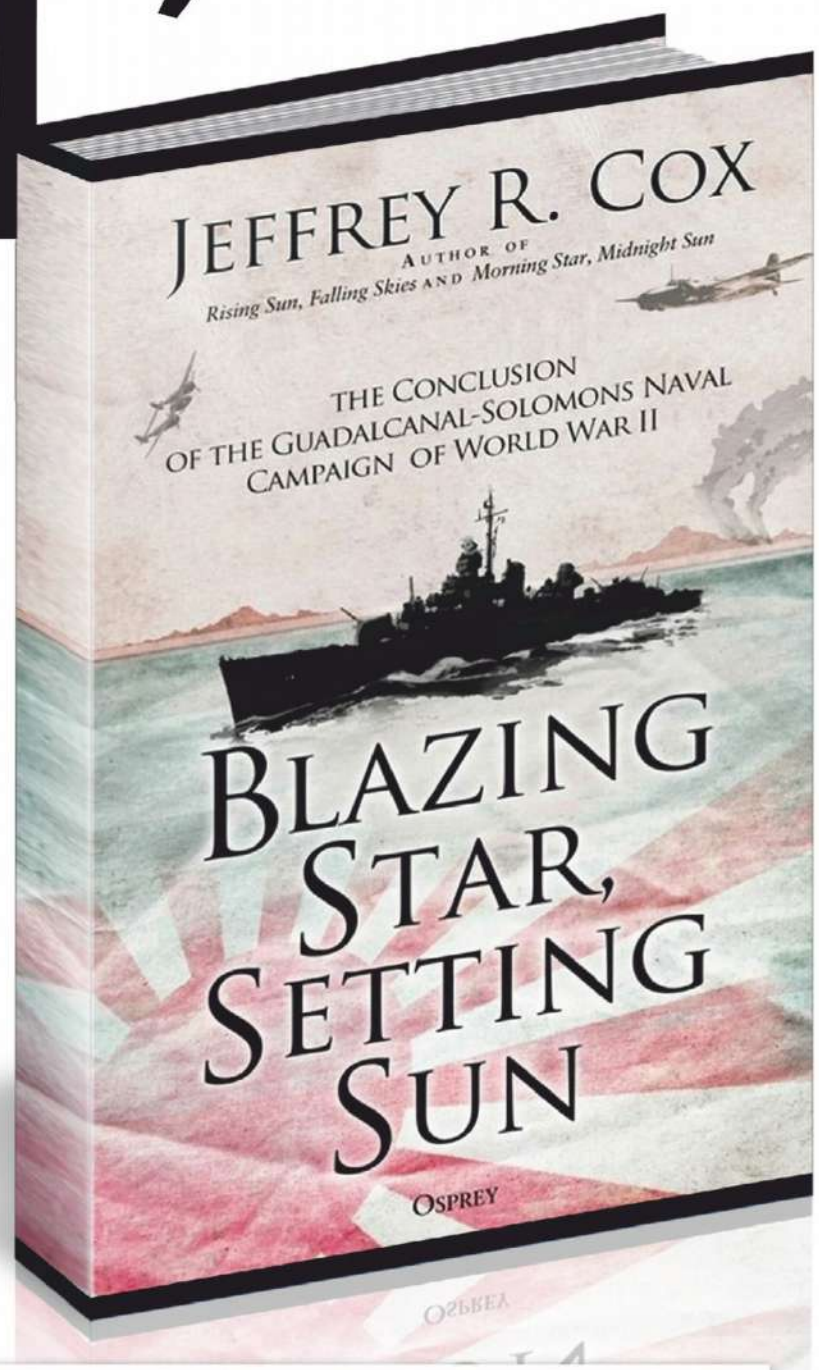
Ultimately what we get from Friðriksdóttir's exploration of the sagas for examples of the roles and bearing of women of the age is a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what remains a deeply patriarchal culture. The Vikings as we know them don't necessarily change much in the reading, but they become deeper and more complex. For every steadfast rule there is an exception that disproves it or at the very least bends it significantly.

As we began by saying in this review, *Valkyrie* is a book that manages to blend the grounded realities and the fantastic stories. By being about Viking women it is necessarily a book that concentrates on domestic life over adventures on the high seas, but the way the two feed into one another is also shown and dissected brilliantly. If you're looking for a deeper understanding of the Viking world that breaks out from the usual tales of conquest, but still enjoy a generous sprinkling of the fantastic, then this is a book that is well worth checking out. **JG**

BLAZING STAR, SETTING SUN

AFTER THE SOLOMON ISLANDS CAMPAIGN, THE US WENT ON THE OFFENSIVE, RELENTLESSLY PUSHING THE JAPANESE WAR MACHINE TOWARDS ITS SUNSET

Author: Jeffrey R. Cox **Publisher:** Osprey
Price: £25 **Released:** June 2020



Glowing in its attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Japanese Imperial Navy began to occupy islands throughout the western Pacific. Tokyo's goal was to create a buffer against attack from the US and its allies, to ensure Japanese mastery over the southwest Pacific. Eight months later, the US carried out its first major amphibious landing of the war at Guadalcanal. This marked the commencement of Operation Watchtower, the American offensive of the campaign. The Allied invasion ignited a ferocious struggle marked by seven major naval battles, numerous clashes ashore and almost continuous air combat. For six months, US forces fought to hold the island. In the end they prevailed, and the Allies took the first vital step in driving back the Japanese in the Pacific theatre.

Jeffrey R. Cox offers an authoritative account of the Solomon Islands campaign, starting with Guadalcanal and followed in quick succession by surprise US landings on the islands of Tulagi and Florida on the morning of 9 August 1942. These seaborne operations opened the way for America to put Japanese naval power on the run. As the author points out, it was far from a walkover. This was tragically illustrated by the Savo Island debacle of 8 and 9 August. "The full brunt of the Japanese attack fell on the 8-inch-armed heavy cruisers and their screening destroyers guarding the western approaches to the invasion beachheads," says Cox. "It was a disaster, the worst defeat in US Navy history."

Japan's fate was nevertheless sealed. According to Cox, Operation Watchtower "was more than a military operation. It was the changing of a mindset, from desperate hunted to opportunistic hunter and, for the enemy, vice versa". The tide of war in the Pacific had turned in America's favour. **JS**

A US Marine patrol crosses the Matanikau River on Guadalcanal, September 1942

Source: Wiki / PD Art

CHRONICLE OF A DOWNFALL

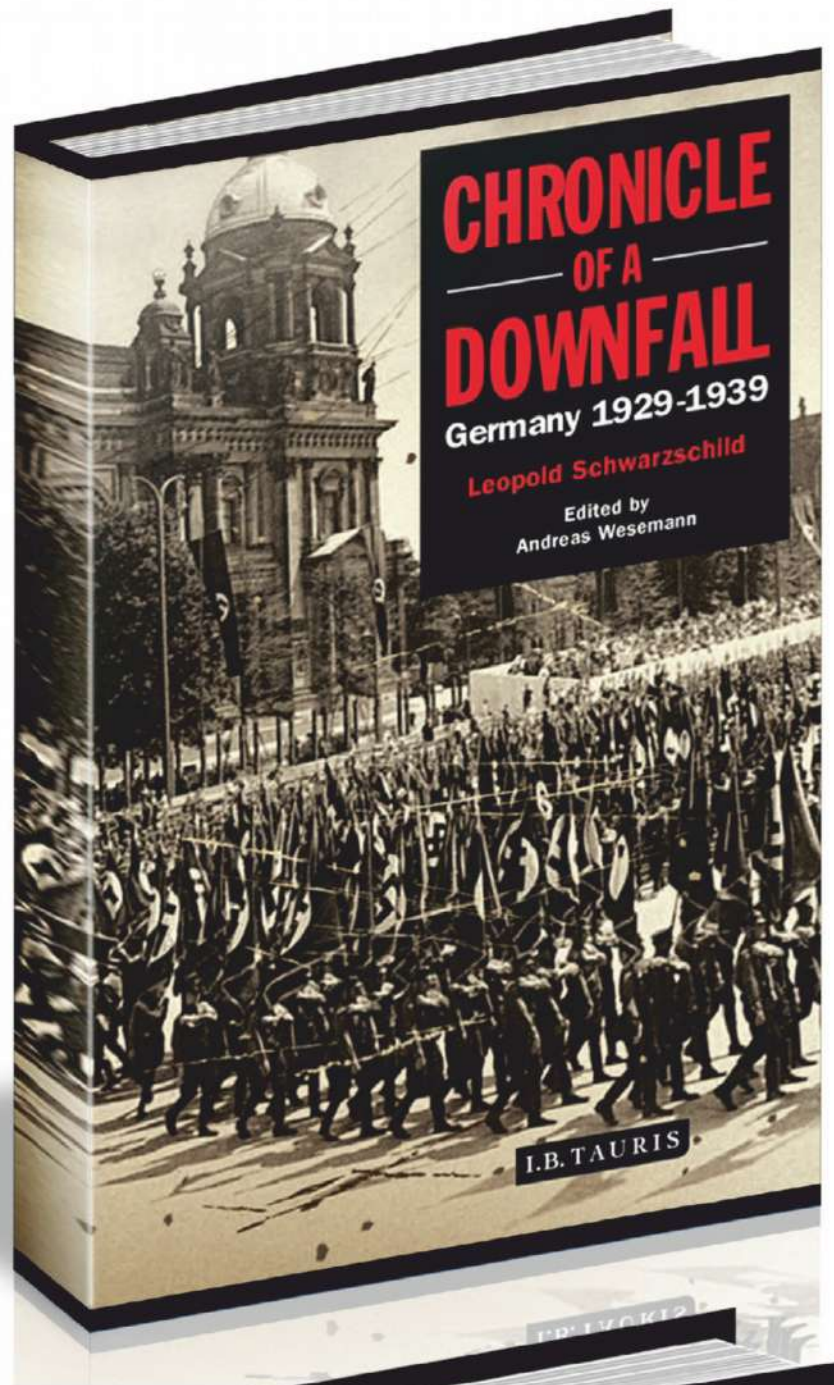
AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE FALL OF GERMANY'S FIRST EXPERIMENT WITH DEMOCRACY AND THE DESCENT OF EUROPE INTO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Writer: Leopold Schwarzschild **Publisher:** I.B. Tauris
Price: £28.99 **Released:** June 2020

Leopold Schwarzschild was a German-Jewish journalist who fled to Paris in 1933. There he mounted a furious attack on the European powers who were taken off guard by the Nazi ascendancy. Winston Churchill hailed Schwarzschild's account of the demise of German democracy as, "An invaluable contribution to the enlightenment of those who care to be enlightened."
In 1943, Churchill made one of his later books, *World In Trance*, a history of international relations during the interwar period, required reading for the War Cabinet.

In March 1935 Hitler announced the reintroduction of conscription and the creation of a significant air force, both illegal under the Versailles Treaty. This happened exactly at the point in time that Schwarzschild had perceptively identified as the Rubicon which, once crossed, would inevitably mean war. In his journal, Neue Tage-Buch, Schwarzschild boldly campaigned to place a cordon sanitaire around Germany, a system similar to the Triple Entente, that would bring together all European powers. The proposal was stillborn, apart from other reasons because Britain was opposed to anything that would upset the 'balance of power' in Europe and endanger the attempt to reach some amicable settlement with Germany. This collection of articles by Schwarzschild offers a clear and often chilling vision of Hitler's criminal ambition to achieve unlimited power.

Schwarzschild was a myth-buster, who revealed that Hitler was in fact "a defeated man when victory was gifted to him. His play for power had already failed when he was offered the opportunity to gain it by the back door". It was, in effect, a chicanery by the camarilla of Prussian Junkers and Westphalian industrialists. The book makes for impressive reading, even in hindsight. **JS**



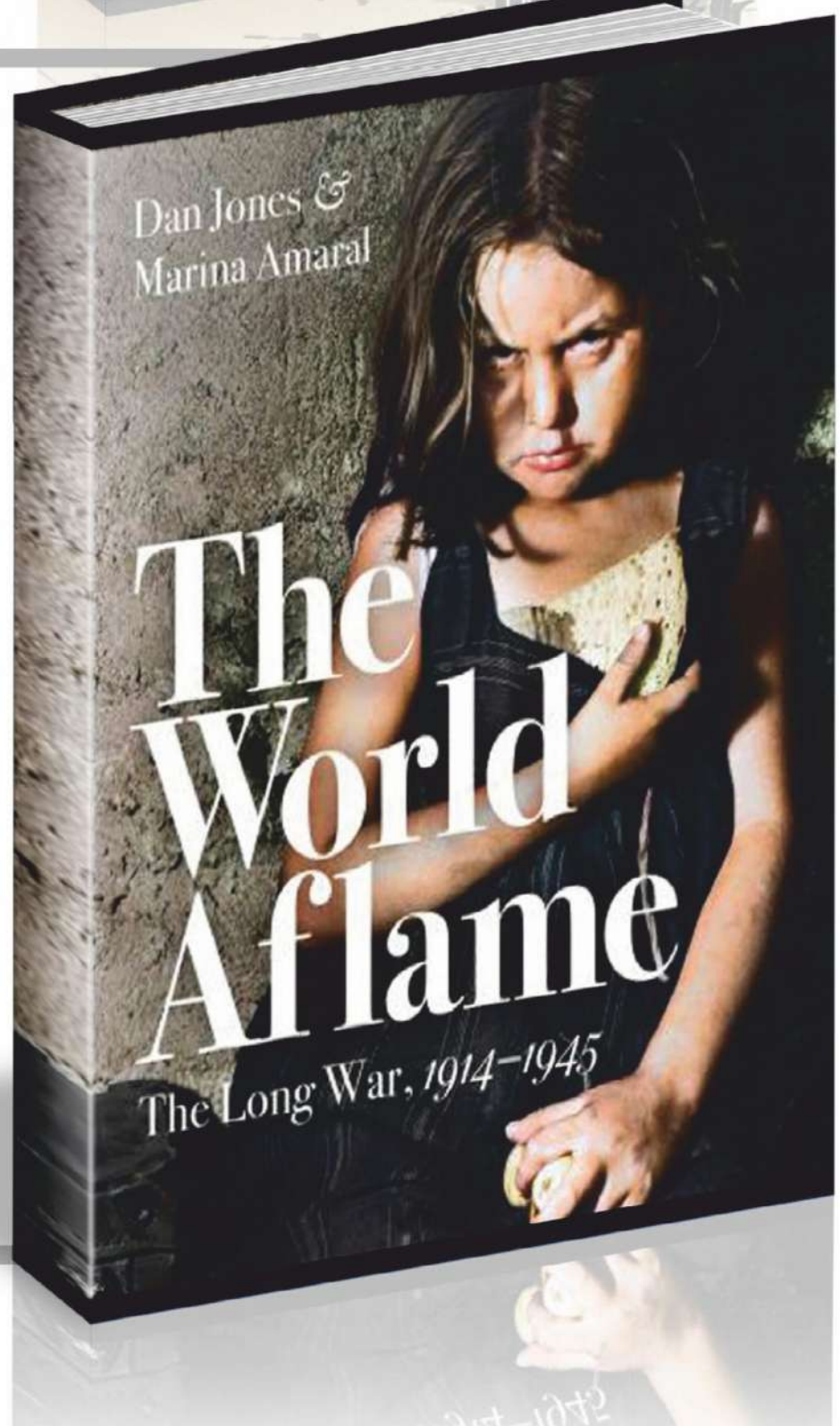
THE WORLD AFLAME

THE STORY OF ONE OF HISTORY'S DARKEST PERIODS IS TOLD THROUGH BEAUTIFUL AND INSPIRING ARTISTRY, WITH HARD-HITTING NARRATIVE

Authors: Dan Jones, Marina Amaral, with Mark Hawkins-Dady
Publisher: Head of Zeus **Price:** £25.00 **Released:** Out now

The World Aflame is the second collaboration between British historian Dan Jones and Brazilian artist Marina Amaral, following the pair's hugely successful *The Colour Of Time*. Taking the same format, balancing re-colourised photography with written narrative, this time the focus is on the dark period of the first half of the 20th century, between 1914 and 1945. *The World Aflame* contains 200 stunning photographs from across both world wars – some iconic, but also many less well-known but nonetheless intimate and engaging snapshots in time. Each image is accompanied by a detailed account of historical context and explanation, taking the reader on the narrative journey across the decades. Jones provides essential details, highlighting key battles and landmark events with insightful commentary and factual description.

Though adding colour to monochrome photos has long been the subject of debate – with some suggesting it does not add anything, or even that it is disrespectful to historical images – there is no question that Amaral brings a visceral and at times brutal realism to the photos. It is clear there has been a huge amount of meticulous research behind each treatment, and the details that the addition of colour unlocks is engrossing. Once again, Jones and Amaral complement each other fantastically, providing a visual and written narrative that connects the two World Wars, as well as the many other conflicts between. This demonstrates the theory of the 'Thirty-years' or 'Long-war', during which immeasurable change impacted the entire world. Awe-inspiring, often emotional and at times breathtaking, this is a worthy addition for any historian's shelves. **TW**



Q&A: JEFFREY COX

EXPERT ON THE PACIFIC THEATRE DISCUSSES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GUADALCANAL-SOLOMON CAMPAIGN, AND SOME OF THE TOUGH LESSONS THE ALLIES HAD TO USE TO GAIN VICTORY OVER IMPERIAL JAPAN. THIS IS THE SUBJECT OF HIS NEW BOOK BLAZING STAR, SETTING SUN, OUT 25 JUNE

What were some of the main shortcomings and major changes that took place within the US Navy by late 1942?
The Java Sea campaign exposed more than a few shortcomings within the American military establishment as well as its major allies. Some of those shortcomings could be explained by the overwhelming Japanese superiority, especially in air power, in that campaign. But not all of it by any means.

There were massive logistical and supply issues in the Java Sea campaign, in part because the theatre was so far from the US and Britain but also because the US was unprepared for the war and Britain was stretched almost to the breaking point by her fight against Hitler. By August 1942, US Navy logistics, while hardly perfect, had improved exponentially. The importance of adequate supplies in the theatre cannot be overstated. During the Battle of Edson's Ridge, Japanese troops had broken through the US Marine line, but instead of pushing through to their objective these famished soldiers stopped to gorge themselves on stores of American food. That by itself may have literally cost Japan the Guadalcanal campaign.

Another major problem during the Java Sea campaign was the area of information and communications. While separate facets, they are so interrelated that they must be considered together. Both were so bad during the Java Sea campaign that they were almost nonexistent.

The Guadalcanal campaign began with the disaster at Savo Island, in which almost everything that could go wrong with information and communications did go wrong, but this was perhaps a blessing in disguise because it was the proverbial wake-up call that got these seemingly mundane issues taken more seriously.

Was High Command unified in the island-hopping strategy? Were there any alternative plans that were considered?
No and no. The Guadalcanal-Solomons campaign was ultimately the brainchild of Admiral Ernest King, the Commander-in-Chief of the US fleet. He leveraged some lawyerly language in the 'Germany First' Arcadia Declaration into the Guadalcanal-Solomons offensive. His counterparts on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General George Marshall and Army Air Force General Henry 'Hap' Arnold were 'Germany First' to the point where they tried to starve the Pacific War of resources, Arnold to an almost ludicrous degree. They were completely uninterested in the Pacific War at all, let alone a Pacific offensive. That is, until General MacArthur escaped the disaster (partly of his own making) in the Philippines and was available for assignment. Then they became advocates of a Pacific offensive – if it was led by General MacArthur. That was not acceptable to Admiral King or the Navy, so at the start the Navy was on its own.

The opposition to the Guadalcanal campaign was not just with Admiral King's colleagues on the joint chiefs, but some of his subordinates as well. While Admiral Nimitz was rather agnostic as to the entire thing, Admiral Robert Ghormley, made the South Pacific Commander and thus in strategic command of the campaign, was opposed to it from the outset believing it would fail, and to prepare for that failure hoarded resources that were badly needed on Guadalcanal. Even worse, Admiral Frank Fletcher, who led the US carriers in the South Pacific, famously declared in a combative conference meeting that the Guadalcanal offensive would fail.

Moving up the Solomons chain after Guadalcanal was secured was always in Admiral King's plan. That involved MacArthur because the middle and upper Solomons were part of MacArthur's command area. And MacArthur had his own ideas about how to proceed. They involved moving up through New Guinea and across New Britain to take Rabaul. This dispute was solved much later rather amicably and, ultimately, both the New Guinea and Solomons routes were incorporated into the planned campaign.

How prepared were the US ground forces for the conditions during the campaign?
To put it simply, they weren't. That is not meant as a criticism of the US Marines or the US Army. Soldiers, sailors and air crews repeatedly train so that their duties and responsibilities in combat are ingrained in muscle memory and instinct. However, there is only so much you can train.

The Marines also had to fight not only the Japanese but the environment: the heat, the rain and especially the mosquitos. The 1st Marine Division was almost completely untrained in jungle warfare [so] they were lucky that for the first few weeks after the landing, the Japanese largely left them alone, giving the Marines time to adjust to the jungle environment. Later in the Guadalcanal-Solomons campaign, during the New Georgia operation, troops had to adjust to the jungle and combat at the same time. It was too much at one time for many of those troops.

Amphibious operations were also a relatively new thing for the US military. Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner had to assemble an amphibious force from scratch. When he received this assignment, he commented to Admiral King that he did not know how to create and lead an amphibious force. King responded, "You will learn." This line in essence became one of the bases for the Guadalcanal-Solomons campaign and, indeed, the entire war effort, encapsulated by the phrase 'makee learnee'.

The Guadalcanal landings were 'makee learnee' on a grand scale. Despite all of Admiral Turner's preparations, the rehearsal for the landings were a disaster and the landings themselves, while successful, were a mess. Landing the troops was not so much an issue as landing the supplies. Combat loading was basically only a theory at this time, and the lack of proper loading both hampered unloading and left the Marines short of supplies for about the first month of the campaign.

Was a Japanese defeat in the Pacific inevitable?
Not at all. The Japanese government went into the war with no illusions as to the manufacturing disparity as well as the probable outcome of the war. But the Japanese strategy was the same strategy later used against the US by North Vietnam, the Viet Cong and the Taliban: to outlast the US politically. To take so much territory in that six months and so fortify the defences of that territory that efforts to liberate it would take such a long time and cause so many casualties that the American public would find it unacceptable and look for a negotiated settlement that would allow Japan to keep that territory. Of course, that strategy depended on not so infuriating the American public that such a negotiated settlement became politically unacceptable in the US. That was the effect of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Although the Japanese went to war in the Pacific to seize the resources needed to secure an acceptable resolution to their invasion of China, the Japanese could have withdrawn from China, but that would have been a loss of 'face', which remains an important facet of East Asian countries like Japan and China that remains imperfectly understood in the West. The inescapable fact is that when given a choice between a probable catastrophic loss in a war and a loss of 'face', the Japanese government chose the war. Such a choice might be unthinkable to us, but it is not in East Asia.

The Guadalcanal campaign is less well known than other Pacific operations. What do you think is the reason for this and what makes this unsung campaign so essential to understanding the Pacific theatre?
I don't know that the Guadalcanal campaign is unsung so much as the Solomons campaign, which is one reason I've tried to tie the two together into one overall campaign, but to the extent that is so I would cite three primary reasons.

First is the length of the campaign. Operations to secure Guadalcanal took six months, from August 1942 to February 1943. Except for the sieges of Rabaul and Truk, that would be the longest active operation of the Pacific War by far.

Second would be the emotional impact of the campaign. For Midway, the emotional impact comes from the fact that the US Navy had not only stopped the Japanese but gave the Japanese a bloody nose with the loss of four carriers of Kido Butai and the cruiser Mikuma. But usually much of that impact comes from just how costly the campaign was in human lives. There were maybe 26,000 Allied casualties at Iwo Jima and roughly 82,000 at Okinawa. By comparison, the six months of Guadalcanal led to some 15,000 dead and wounded among all branches of the military. Heavy casualty figures capture public attention and emotion, and understandably so.

Finally, there is the campaign's visual aspect or lack thereof, which are important in capturing the readers' and viewers' attention and imagination. For Iwo Jima, you have the, staged, photo of the US Marines raising the flag on Mount Suribachi. For Okinawa, you have the kamikaze run that ended in the sinking of the superbattleship Yamato, photos of whose explosion were disseminated widely.

What does Guadalcanal have? Nothing that can compare to any of the above. Most of the major battles of the Guadalcanal-Solomons campaign took place at night or over long distances. Neither situation lends itself to good photographs.

All of these factors combine to make the Guadalcanal-Solomons campaign very difficult to encapsulate. Though Midway shattered the myth of Japanese invincibility and victory, Guadalcanal started etching the Japanese defeat in the Pacific War in stone.

Source: Wiki / PD Gov

Navy troop transport USS President Jackson (AP-37) manoeuvring under Japanese air attack off Guadalcanal, 12 November 1942

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ZULU SHIELD

This distinctive ‘ishilunga’ was captured at the Battle of Ulundi, the final engagement of the Anglo-Zulu War

The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 was arguably the most famous colonial conflict that the British Empire fought during the 19th century. The British attempt to annex Zululand in southern Africa was met with fierce resistance from Zulu warriors who fought tenaciously to preserve their independence. Although the Zulus possessed some firearms they were far less technologically equipped than the British. They largely used spears and shields along with clever tactics to inflict humiliating defeats on the British at the battles of Isandlwana, Intombe and Hlobane.

Isandlwana in particular was a huge victory for the Zulus where they killed over 1,300 Imperial troops and halted the first British invasion of Zululand. The British licked their wounds and returned to finally defeat the Zulus at their capital of Ulundi on 4 June 1879.

Among the items that were captured at Ulundi was this cowhide shield. Known as an ‘ishilunga’, the shield became a symbol of Zulu resistance. Although it was simple in design, the ishilunga contained complex information about its owner. The colours helped to identify warriors in battle and even their marital status. Warriors with formidable reputations had white shields with one or two spots while their inexperienced counterparts’ shields were black. Middle-ranked warriors would similarly have red and white shields. The patterning would also identify which ‘impi’ (regiment) the warrior fought with.

The pictured shield formed part of the symbolic spoils of Ulundi. Although less famous than the previous battles of Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift, Ulundi was a decisive British victory and a disaster for the Zulus. Their capital was burned, the Zulu king Cetshwayo was captured and Zululand was broken up into 13 British districts.

***Left:** This ishilunga may have belonged to a middle-ranking warrior with its white and red-brown pattern*

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The Zulu shield forms part of the National Army Museum’s collection, which can be viewed online at:

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